**Mindfulness in Action Spring 2016**

**FIRST SESSION: 7 April 2016**

**Summary**

**Meeting together in the Room of Openness: Arrivals and Departures**

* **Mindfulness-in-Action: Arrivals 1)** Reflective moments on the journey to come to the class and how you arrive at mindfulness practice. The present moment as a point of arrival from the past and the preparation to depart into the future. Observing discomfort and comfort and taking responsibility for one's self.
* **Mindfulness-in-Action: arrivals 2)** The remembering self and the experiencing self. Finding images on the walls that you like and dislike.
* **Mindfulness-in-Action: Arrivals 3)** The movement of attention and the spread of awareness. The present moment and the experiencing self as situating you in space.
* **Mindfulness-in-Action: Departures:** where are we going? Bottom-up and top-down approaches. The joy in finding out. Priorities: mindfulness awakens before it informs. Ancient wisdom traditions and the insights of the latest neuroscience. Kindness: you deserve the best of both worlds!

**In the room of Healthy Action: moving with presence through space.**

* **Movement Procedure 1),** balance and the management of weight. Standing on one leg and the story of Hillel.
* **Movement Procedure 2**) Connecting the brain between-the-ears with the brain below-the–ears: attention and listening loudly!
* **Movement Procedure 3).** A contemplative walk. One step forward one step back.

**In the Room of Good Sense**

* **Mindfulness-in-Action: Good sense 1)** Some questions. The experiencing self and the questioning state. Being comfortable with not knowing**.**
* **Mindfulness-in-Action: Good sense 2):** An ancient and modern Mindfulness-in-Action Meditation: “May I and others around me be safe and well”

On Thursday 7 April a group of nine individuals meet together in *The Room of Openness* at Bashful-Alley-Centre to explore Mindfulness-in-Action.

People arrive at the Centre from many different starting points in order to come to the same workshop destination.

**In the Room of Openness: Arrivals and Departures**

**Arrivals 1) Getting here!**

We begin with a reflective moment in which you consider your journey here today. In a way the quaintness of Bashful Alley is a nexus point for our different journeys as we arrive here: We all walked through the ancient cobbled alley and up those steep stairs.

Everyday habitual actions such as walking or climbing stairs actually involve a cosmic complexity in which scintillating cascades of exquisitely timed nerve impulses and muscle contractions operate at a level far below our conscious awareness. In a way, thank goodness we are not overwhelmed by such complexity! After all, we have an important end purpose, an intended flow line of action: we want to climb the stairs, we want to open the door, and most of all we want to arrive here in the Centre for the Mindfulness-in-Action workshop.

We share an intention in mindfulness. However our individual expectations may well be very different – indeed as different as the journeys that brought us all here.

We are taking an opening invitation to a reflective moment in order to focus on the journey that happened in our very recent past as we consider how we came here today, the arc through space and time that has deposited us together now - here in the present moment. In this reflective way of thinking we could even expand the thought of this trajectory and take in the great arc or trajectory of our lives from conception to this present moment. Whatever unexpected things happen in our lives we are always deposited in the Present Moment. In the Present Moment we organize our departures into the imminent future. Places of arrival and departure such as railway stations and airports are threshold places full of bustle and movement from which, like the Present Moment we incessantly arrive and depart.

We all share an interest in Mindfulness. As the organizer/facilitator of these Mindfulness-in-Action workshops, I arrive here, into the Present Moment with a journey of three years in which I have been involved in organizing these Mindfulness-in-Action groups.

The following has happened in my experience: The two individuals that I am about to tell you about did not attend the same workshop, but let's imagine them for the moment as now as sitting side-by-side together. One individual has a hidden phobia of speaking aloud their name to a group of people. Without being told about it I can't know this inner turmoil. If, as group facilitator, I ask people to introduce their names, then this individual will become severely uncomfortable. The person next to him however, is a stickler for social protocol and will be outraged and very uncomfortable if we do not begin by going round and announcing our names. The point of telling you this is simply to establish the impossibility of my knowing what others have experienced in the bow wave of their past life that may make them uncomfortable. Through this I have come to see that it is my role ***to draw your attention to observing states of comfort and discomfort***. It is also important to state clearly at the outset that it is vitally important that you ***look after yourself as we go through various Mindfulness-in-Action*** ***explorations.***

Everything is always offered ***as an invitation.*** There is no force patterning. In taking responsibility and in looking after yourself with care and kindness please feel free to step back from any Mindfulness-in-Action exploration or activity.

Should you at times feel the need to leave the space then please be caring and considerate to the other participants.

**Arrivals 2) Arriving where you are**

*Mindfulness–in-Action explorations open to the possibility that we embody two distinct selves:* **the remembering self, and the experiencing sel*f*.**

Our first and opening short meditation invites you to engage ***your remembering self*** and to reflect on a recent journey and on how you got here today. This engages the kind of thinking usually referred to as “***re--***presentational thought”. You may notice that there are a lot of***“re-“*** hyphen type words in this type of thinking : for example ***“re****-membering”,****”re****-flecting”,”* ***re-****presentational”.* This is the kind of thinking within us all that runs the narrative storyline-trajectories of our lives. During this meditation on getting here, we reflected on the fact that we are in some ways complex bundles of matter energy and information moving through space and time. These life trajectories arc out from the past and they also project themselves into the future. In the process however, they are always depositing us into the Present Moment and that is the realm of a radically different type of thinking of ***the experiencing self.*** We are going to explore this as thought-in-action.

In the second of the Mindfulness-in-Action “Arrivals” invitations you are invited to wander round the rooms and walkways of Bashful Alley Centre and look at the images and writing on the walls. You are asked to select two images: one that you are drawn to and that you like; and another that strikes you in the opposite way, one that you are, in some way **not** drawn to. You can approach this invitation quite intuitively. You will not be asked to justify your choice! As you do this exercise you will look through the present moment sensations of the experiencing self and then as you perceive and take in the images, you will draw upon various remembered values and past experiences that create within you, a sense of things that you like and are drawn to and also the other things that somehow repel you and that you do not particularly like or feel drawn to.

A little later on we will revisit this experience and develop and deepen our awareness of it.

**Arrivals 3) The Present Moment and the experiencing self**

The sense of one's self ***is always situated*** ***in the present moment:*** we always are positioned in space and time. We are nine different individuals who occupy the same room space. In this procedure you are invited to inwardly turn your attention in order ***to more fully tune in to the specific relationship between the inner space contained within your skin, and the outer space contained within the four walls of the room*** and importantly, also in the process, to take in the eight other individuals who occupy the space of the room.

Your attention is guided to an expanding awareness. Your consciousness in the present moment can spread to an awareness of the surface of your skin. Modern science has helped us to understand that skin is really not at all like a containing sack. Your skin is more accurately: ***an organ of your brain.*** Your skin could be thought of as *your brain turned inside out*! Your brains interface with the world without. The latest neuro-science regards the skin as an important part of the **D*istributed Nervous System.*** This new way of thinking enables the mind to escape from the previous theoretical confines of the skull and the central nervous system and enables mind to be appreciated as distributed everywhere –ultimately even to every cell in your body!

In this procedure we may celebrate the high degree of control that we have over our attention and how it can be controlled and moved around between both inner and outer spaces. We touch into a sense of the important boundary between **inner and outer space** space by selecting points on the skin surface and then radiating imaginary lines outwards to the four surrounding walls. As these lines multiply it develops an exquisite sense of the exact volume and shape taken by your sitting body. As you move your attention around following these projected lines, whenever a projected line intersects with another body/self in the room, you may acknowledge their presence by breaking the line until you get to the other side of their volume and space and continue out to the wall.

This Mindfulness-in-Action procedure is very much focused on the present moment sensations and the experiencing self. It takes in the complex boundary of your inner space and eventually situates it in a roomful of eight other selves who each occupy their own inner space.

We sit quite intimately still in this procedure and it builds up a mindful sense of how in the moment, the structures of our bodies relate to each other within the space of the room. From that still and present-centred awareness, even a tiny movement: a lift of the finger or a raise of the elbow creates a shimmering and complex kaleidoscopic shifting of the radiating lines. As we next go on upstairs from this still start, and begin to explore movement and action, the inner space and outer space will change in incredibly complex ways.

In this Mindfulness-in-Action procedure the experiencing self is guided and mentored to an awareness of the global head to toe nature of the skin. The "Arrivals" meditation ends with your attention finally zeroing-in and guided to a site-specific place on the skin surface***: the place that the air around becomes the current of breath as it enters through the nostrils or lips.***

The Mindfulness-in-Action “Arrivals meditation closes with a celebration of the diffuse air all around us as something that like the support of the ground we sit on, we all share.

***Two Opening Mindfulness-in-Action Reflections****:*

 *At this level of present-centred awareness, once we start to move and act together and in relation to one another, there is a mind-boggling complexity in the way that our individual actions relate and interweave one in relation to the other.*

 *The experiencing-self readily acknowledges that the present moment contains a raging torrent, a flowing mighty river of sensations of which our attention can sample only a tiny drop!*

*A sense of awe and wonder always suffuses an entry into the experiencing-self.*

***Departures: Where are we going?***

As these Arrivals procedures draw to a close an outline of the signposts or way-markers for the remainder of the rest of the course are presented:

* ***you are invited not to record all write down experiences during the workshop. A detail record in summary of the work will be provided***

 ***Bottom up approaches:***

The only way to work effectively with the experiencing self is ***to work, to study, learn and explore from the bottom-up***. The top ‘storey’ of the brain contains the remembering-self. There is no way to work from the top down that will allow an effective penetration from the remembering-self into the subconscious levels that exist below the top level, the roof of the brain or cortex that houses the 1% of the brain that contains representational thought and the remembering self. The Mindfulness-in-Action courses aims to work through the experiencing self and to penetrate into the 99% of the brain and our being that may perhaps hold the secrets of our past origins and perhaps even our future as a species.

 ***Mindfulness-in-Action reveals how the joy of learning is not in the knowing but in the finding out!***

The essence of the bottom-up approach lies ***not*** in drawing on the **expertise** of others to find ***answers and solutions*** but to establish self-directed ways to ***question, to explore and experience*** the process of thinking and acting together: the living experience that enables us to discover who we really are.

 ***“Mindfulness awakens before it informs.”***

It is vital to establish a sense of a first thing and a second thing priority here: *there is nothing whatsoever wrong with a desire to be well informed about the ideas of Mindfulness and of* Mindfulness-in-Action *practice, however that only comes after a certain* ***effort of attention*** *that has awakens something deep within us and that accesses what we already in fact know*. The process of connecting to this knowingness happens, not after some ‘stepping stones’ to some future enlightened and Mindfulness state, but ***by accessing something that we have been ignoring up to now, and that is available and accessible right now in the Present Moment through the experiencing self and that the remembering self chooses to ignore***. It becomes clear in the Present Moment that Mindfulness is a ***way into integrated action*** in which the present moment merges and overflows into the next ***"Now".*** In an ancient wisdom tradition the ancient Greeks mythologized ***Eros*** in precisely this way: as a vessel continuously having to overspill in order to refill itself. Life is in the present moment within the experiencing self and not in the past or futures created by the remembering self.

 ***The relationship between the process of awareness and the skill of conscious attention****.*

In Mindfulness-in-Action practice thi*s* relationship is important: Sometimes we use the word "*mindful"* to mean”*awareness”* as in the sentence:

***"I was not*** *mindfu****l of his presence behind me."*** There is another sense in which we use the word in which it means more to take care and attention:

***"When I run barefoot it is wise to be*** *mindful* ***of broken glass".***

 ***Ancient and modern!***

The aim of expanding awareness and extending the skill of focused attention is present in the long history of the great wisdom teachings and traditions of the world. In Mindfulness-in-Action practice we will draw upon these ancient practices and traditions. There is these days yet another important strand that flows into mindfulness practice: ***The modern unfurling understanding of the brain and its workings from modern neuroscience.*** When ancient and modern flow together, scientific insight can assist our explorations with a deep understanding of the architecture and operation of the structures of the human brain.

 ***The best of both worlds!***

Something new and transformative may emerge when in Mindfulness-in-Action practice the rational and the intuitive, when art and science, when the experiencing-selfand the remembering-self flow coherently together.

***Following on from the session in the Room of Openness we move upstairs into the Room of Healthy Action for the next session.***

**In the Room of Healthy Action: Movement through Space**

A great deal of the human brain’s unconscious activity involves organizing and preparing the body for action. A fundamental part of this features something that we are generally unaware of and pay very little attention to: it is the ***way that our physical weight is being continuously managed.***

In this Mindfulness-in-Action session we engage the experiencing self with an awareness of the extraordinary sensations in the present moment that are involved in simply standing still. There is a huge amount of activity and also a huge metabolic cost in keeping your body standing upright. It requires constant movement to maintain dynamic balance. Even when this is being managed wonderfully well and in the most balanced way there is a always constant movement: those slight adjustment that have to be made to prevent us falling over. This is similar to adjusting the tip and travel of a pole ruler that you might balance on your fingertip.

You are invited to explore shifting weight from one foot to the other. We can easily achieve this. We can do it! The particular interest we want to bring attention to is ***not*** that we can achieve this but just exactly how is this weight transference being modulated:

 So - exactly how does each foot except the weight?

 Are there any differences in the way that each foot takes weight?

 How much can you ease and release from head to toe as one side is freed from the role of supporting your weight?

 As we all walked this morning here this morning through cobbled Bashful Alley approximately 80% of the time, in your walking gait, you will have supported yourself on one leg. That you can lift your foot off the floor to achieve this in order to walk (rather than shuffle!) is ***a certainty***. *Through* Mindfulness-in-Action practices we want to challenge such certainty – we want to open up to its habitual nature and to question it. This kind of questioning particularly engages the experiencing self. You are invited to go deeply into this and to consider not the end product but the process: exactly ***how do you achieve lifting your foot lift from the floor in order to take a walking step?***

As we continue to explore the sway of weight from side to side we allow this gently to expand to a brief moment when you completely stand on one leg. As we explore this feat of balance, the experience is related of another workshop leader who is called Hillel. One of Hillel's workshop participants is a forthright and impatient young man. He already feels overloaded with information and so he challenges the workshop leader quite tetchily and assertively:

"Look – I want you to put what this is all about into a nut-shell for me and I want you to do it briefly -do it in the length of time that I can balance on one leg”.

He proceeds to wobble and balance on one leg and Hillel, quite up for the challenge, says briefly, as his impatient young pupil stands on one leg:

***"That which you find hateful to you- do not do this to your neighbour!”***

The impatient younger man puts his foot down and says to Hillel:

***“Okay- now I get that easily enough. What next?"…***

Before we go on with the story of Hillel you are invited now to repeat this exercise as a Mindfulness-in-Action practice. Balancing on one leg can be tricky and some participants can only manage a very short time on one leg so the message gets shortened to:

***"Be kind."***

Balance improves slightly as we try this for a second time. This time there's time enough to put in:

***"Before being kind to others, first be kind to yourself."***

So back to the story… At the point that the impatient young man asks:*so what next?...*

…The workshop leader Hillel answers:

"***Now that you put your foot down you may consider it as taking the next step on the path of self study and self questioning!"***

This is the extremely tricky bit but -hey -it really is where all the fun begins!

What happened to the young man in his efforts to walk the path of self-study and self-questioning?

We do not know. We have no idea. The account of the workshop was written down over 2000 years ago – perhaps sometime between 30BC and 10AD. The account comes from yet another wisdom tradition: Hillel was a leading rabbinical patriarch acting in the role of guide and mentor to others in reading the Talmud. All the great wisdom traditions have some similar version to Hillel's nutshell version. In fact the admonition to ***"Love thy neighbour as thyself***” was formulated by another Jew contemporaneously and pretty much in the same spot on the globe!

***The point?*** *The remembering self can attain a concept. It can get the idea. In* Mindfulness-in-Action practice t*he hard work of self-study and self-questioning must engage the action and the conduct of the experiencing self. Only through a mindful process of this kind, one that integrates the remembering self with the experiencing self, can we “walk the talk”, and to live the principal. Without that attention to self work the guiding principle cannot be brought to a life that lives and breathes in the present moment. It remains an idea - albeit an important one, on the shadows flickering on the cave wall of the skull (Plato). One key aim of* Mindfulness-in-Action *practice:* ***to get out of your head!***

Awareness and attention are key players in drawing together the remembering self and the experiencing self. Neuroscience has recently developed some understanding as to just what happens when the remembering self is in full control and puts the body onto Automatic Pilot It means that we walk along in a kind of mechanical trance while our mind is off somewhere else- in the pastor in the future, on those deadlines, the worrying and the planning that is such an intrinsic part of the remembering-self. The latest neuroscience refers to the state of being on Automatic pilot as ***top-down processing*** in which the body is locked into known and familiar and habitual grooves. We face the task in Mindfulness-in-Action of reversing the direction of flow from top down to bottom-up. This begins all Mindfulness-in-Action practice

The next exploration is a quintessentially bottom-up process. We intend to switch from a top-down state to a bottom-up state. In this Mindfulness-in-Action practice your attention, in a very ancient way becomes focused and maintained such that it brings the mind and the body are brought into an awake and vigilant ancient relationship.

Our attention in modern conditions is usually massively overtaxed and overloaded. We have adapted to this by learning to rapidly shift attention in our modern multitasking world. It is being discovered that this state comes at a considerable cost! Certainly it seems to lead us into to a state of distraction in which it is difficult for us to experience once more the vigilant and present-centred focused of attention that is perhaps our evolutionary heritage natural state. Our natural living ancestors lived in a world that demanded their attention in a radically different way in order to survive! They lived in a world shaped by ever present danger and scarcity. Our world is shaped by the demands of abundance and a proliferation of choices and managing a deluge of information.

This next procedure is a fast-track way to experience a focused attention that synchronizes the head and the listening sense with the dynamically

moving body.

***An exploration in learning to listen loudly***

In this simple procedure we explore a fast-track way to strip away the veneer of modern lifestyles in order to experience a re-awakening and reconnection of Mind and Body. This perhaps reveals the predominant ‘mindscape’ of our natural living ancestors.

We work in pairs in this Mindfulness-in-Action procedure. One partner agrees to close their eyes while the other partner leads the ‘blind" one around the space. A lot goes on in this simple procedure. ***Trust and cooperation*** is very important: a trust in one's own process and trust in the partner who leads you around space.

We are breathtakingly good at this ***but only if you are prepared to leave yourself alone***. The state we enter into is that of the experiencing self, the awakened and alert state of our ancestors. We are here, present today because our ancestors were the ones that survived. If this opening connection is made then the "blind" partner is brought rivetingly into the Present Moment. Then ***the brain-between-the-ears will re-enmesh with the brain-below-the-ears***. The whole head-to-toe length of the body is brought into an intense and listening state of poise. An active form of listening is engaged: We are ***“listening loudly".*** This will bring the spine into a poised length. With the experience of reconnection, the axis of the spine uncoils like taking a finger from off a coiled spring. The body will turn around the axis of the spine with an uncanny precision as the head, balanced as it is in on an axis that begins with the ears, spins around to follow the direction of the call of your name.

This Mindfulness-in-Action procedure is a fast-track way to experience the awakening aspect of the right effort of attention associated with the experiencing self. It can be like waking up from a mechanical sleep, like reconnecting in experience with the kindred spirits of our natural living ancestors, a way of linking deep into our origins.

We finish off this session in the room of Healthy Action by returning to our earlier questioning of a certainty:

***How does your foot leave the floor when you walk?***

***A contemplative walk***

It is hard to read the print on a fast-moving bus! Sometimes we need to slow down the action. The simple rule in this Mindfulness-in-Action meditative procedure is that you never take two consecutive forward steps together. After each forward step you drop back and take a slow, measured back-step. You may repeat this back-step action as many times as you like. Our aim in this procedure is to fully enter the rich sensations of the present moment and in particular, to occasionally focus in particular on the action of the foot.

The action of taking a back-step becomes a great way to experience more centred state as you move and to bring attention to the length of the back of oneself and to the space behind and to either side.

***In the Room of Good Sense***

Toward the end of the morning workshop we now move downstairs and into the room of Good Sense. As we move towards completing the Mindfulness-in-Action work of the day, we have moved through the three main working rooms or spaces in Bashful Alley Centre: we began in the **Room of Openness** with still and reflective exercises, then we moved upstairs into the room of **Healthy Action** to explore mindful movement, and now we enter into the room of **Good Sense** to round out our full morning of Mindfulness-in-Action work together.

In this session we want to explore the ‘good sense’ in considering how important it is that Mindfulness-in-Action ***awakens the experiencing self before it informs the remembering self***. There is nothing whatsoever wrong at all with being well informed about mindfulness practice. However it may be that the constant grabbing and reaching out for information needs to be bridled back and given an appropriate second thing status. We are about to explore an important priority that places ***first things first!***

***Mindfulness in action awakens before it informs***.

In terms of the great wisdom traditions this awakening is usually expressed as a quest on the pathway way to self-knowledge and enlightenment. This questing or questioning involves something qualitatively different from the type of thought of the remembering self which tends to demand certainty and solutions. We live in a top-down culture that is massively overburdened by information and by answers, solutions and the certainties peddled by experts. The first principle in Mindfulness-in-Action is to question everything- including the whole idea of expertocracy! In today's session we address the unknown by questioning a familiar certainty: the fact that you can lift your foot from the floor in order to walk. We began to question this certainty and to put the process through a rigorous process of questioning. In this next session we open out to embrace uncertainty. We are not looking for certainty but in a process through which we can ascertain – to find out.

In this session we immerse ourselves in the flowing, ever-changing flux that is the nature of the experiencing self in the present moment as it becomes immersed in the enormous realm of ***all that we do not know and can never know, all that we are not conscious of and can never be conscious of.*** The experiencing self may well be the source of the true strength of character as ***it displays itself NOT in what we know and what we can do but in what we do not know and furthermore, how we conduct ourselves when we do not know, when we do not know what to do***. It is a Big Call, a hard challenge to break away from a clinging to certainty, to break away from answers and solutions and to embrace uncertainty and not knowing. However great as the effort is, it may well open up for us a pathway to the extraordinary realm of Being and Non-doing! We need to find out stop

In this session you are invited to allow some spoken questions simply to resound and echo in your experiencing self. You are particularly invited to observe closely how your remembering self may react to these questions: for example, please notice how does your remembering self react to:

 ***answers that you think you know the answer to***

 ***to questions that don't seem to make any sense at all***

 ***to questions that you may feel you should know the answer to and perhaps do not.***

 ***to questions you simply do not know the answer to.***

This is really an exercise in observing comfort and discomfort and in how we have been conditioned with regard to knowing the answers and not knowing. The invitation guides you to a starting point in which you allow the resonance of the questions to be suffused with a sense of openness:

***"I do not know. I am comfortable with not knowing. I am open and curious as to how, TOGETHER we might act, think, cooperate in order to discover.*** Perhaps this might be another step on the path to self-study that the ancient patriarch Hillel suggested to his impatient young pupil. We could perhaps dip into an even more ancient wisdom tradition and consider that the process that we are exploring now as may be coming close to the Mindfulness-in-Action essence of the Socratic method. Socrates is said to have died being absolutely sure of only one thing: ***that he did not know. As perhaps the wisest person that's ever lived on the planet interestingly, he also reputedly never wrote anything down!***

***Mindfulness-in-Action Practice: Exploring the questioning state***

***Question 1) how many vowels sounds are there in human spoken speech?***

***Question 2) how big is your armpit?***

***Question 3) how many bones are there in your body?***

***Question 4) what is a life lived with meaning?***

***Question 5) what proportion of the human brain is conscious?***

***Question 6) how many individual cells constitute the human body?***

***Question 7) what is the precise distance right now between your elbows?***

***Question 8) where on the planet lay the city of Uruk?***

***Question 9) what happened in the city of Uruk to completely change the course of human history?***

***Question 10) you have paced out on the ground a perfect square that is three paces by three paces. You wish to make a square exactly twice the surface area. Within the square that is three paces by three places lies the exact dimension that will tell you precisely how many paces to the side of the square that is twice as big in surface area. What is this dimension and how many paces?***

***Question 11) what was your original face in the moment just before you were conceived?***

***Question 12) what word in the English language is the exact opposite of the word "dementia"?***

***Question 13) what is the difference between awareness and attention?***

***Question 14) how much does your sense of self weigh*?**

*…We move now toward our closing* Mindfulness-in-Action *meditation and we reconnect with the meditation earlier in the morning - where we left off- with an awareness of the ever-present rhythm of the rise and fall of the breat****h*** *and its entry point through the nostrils or mouth and lips…*

***An ancient and modern Mindfulness-in-Action Meditation:***

***"May I be safe and well.***

***May others around me be also safe and well."***

This Mindfulness-in-Action Meditation practice uses the ancient and royal road to present-centred and inwardly turned awareness by focusing on the continuous and rhythmic rise and fall of the breath. This practice is very much in the noble and ancient Buddhist tradition. The breath becomes the ***secure and safe*** haven to guide and to gently return your watchful and caring attention back to.

The Latin word for breath is ‘spiritus’ which forms the root for many words including: ***‘inspiration’.***

There is a free play with attention as it moves back and forth from the breath to different points on the outside "edges" of the body. As in the earlier meditation attention moves out from different points on your body surface and out into the surrounding space pausing at different points, sometimes this might be on a particular body surface spot and then sometimes it may move out as far out of the walls, or out to arm’s length. Eventually this develops a series of radiating lines from the outside surface of the body, and as it grows it creates that strong sense of the space or volume occupied by the body as if seen from the outside.

Attention eventually focuses on the entry point of the breath. This is the point on the body surface around the nostrils and lips where the diffuse air in the space around the body becomes the focused flowing current of air that then enters deep into the inside of the body. This becomes a useful symbol for crossing the line or threshold between the inside and the outside of the body. *These important boundaries can be explored as key features of how a sense of Self is first created and fashioned by the body* sense.

Every breath crosses a series of membranes as it travels deeper and deeper into the body. Eventually the breath will nourish every part of the interior of the Body/Self and this will include the brain, which draws upon approximately a quarter of the total metabolic cost of "running" the body. We are currently now ‘surfiding’ the current of the breath as it moves around the body.

Eventually this can take us deep into an ancient circuitry that is buried deep within your brain. The system of this complex circuitry system continuously filters through a mind-boggling flow of information. It behaves a little like the national security monitoring centre at GCHQ in Cheltenham. Complex as the information is that our Inner Security System handles; basically this system processes a very simple question:

***Is this current situation/person/surroundings safe?***

If the outcome of the complex sifting process is:

"***Yes. It is safe",*** then the body and in particular the social engagement circuitry in the brain clicks into place and we are ready and open to new possibilities. If the answer that filters out is:

***“No, the situation is not safe”,***

If this is the case then the brain proceeds to go into a “lock down" and it then will shut down engagement with the world around and in particular with relationships with people around. It will do this in order to prioritize as it looks to protect the integrity of the body. Should this develop to a high state of alert then eventually it will engage the freeze, fight, flight, or collapse and "play dead" mode.

The aim of this particular Mindfulness-in-Action Meditation practice is to engage the experiencing self and first and foremost, to acknowledge and to express gratitude to this Inner Security System. We are here in our present incarnation because of the way that it functioned in our evolutionary past, even though, especially modern living conditions, it can often make some life ruining errors! Often these errors focus on the **False Negative**: when the security system regards something as a threat to your integrity that is perhaps not really a threat at all. However if we think about the way that evolution has shaped things, it is most likely to err in this direction. This is because our ancestors were most likely the ones who successfully scarpered or took the appropriate defensive or offensive action when there was occasionally, no real threat at all. The ancient individuals who ignored the danger warning signs and who made the **False Positive** error, well- they are very likely ***not*** our ancestors!

***A key higher aim of advanced Mindfulness-in-Action Meditation practice is to become aware of mental activity and to notice and to observe this activity***. In this way we get to know our Selves. In an important sense we begin to ‘kin’ or to ‘ken’ourselves. This is actually how we become ‘kinned’ or ‘kind’ in this way. How we feel and act out of a sense of kindness and compassion. This is an intimate and intuitive process, a kind and accepting type of knowingness that is not worldly in its nature. It does not belong in the realm of the remembering self. It is in fact **Self-knowing.** This closing Mindfulness-in-Action Meditation is perhaps maybe a first step to create a choice in the face of the reactivity of our Inner Security System which can occasionally cause such havoc and life ruining chaos in a modern life.

Our closing meditation moves toward the end with a high level wish or intention that acknowledges once again a deep gratitude for this ancient Security System. The kind and curious attention that may watch over the operation of the system in the brain opens out at the end of the meditation to be an extended wish or intention to be safe and secure:

***“May I be safe and well and may others around me today also be safe and well."***

***Thank you for the openness and the richness that everybody brought to the first Mindfulness-in-Action*** ***workshop of the series!***

**SECOND SESSION: 14 April 2016**

**Summary**

**Meeting together in the Room of HEALTHY ACTION:**

The Present Moment. Arrivals and Departures.

**Mindfulness-in-Action: Arrivals 1**) Wall images/Seeing with presence.

**Mindfulness-in-Action: Arrivals 2**) The invitation to allow the mind the freedom to fully enter that into the complexity and mystery of how our body gains and loses poise as we walk and change direction through space.

**Mindfulness-in-Action: Arrivals 3**) Applied body awareness: We move systematically upwards from the feet in order to ’build’ the length of the “toppling tower” of the standing body.

**Mindfulness-in-Action: Arrivals 4) Thic Nat Hahn Breath and movement:** a gentle lunge forward and reach with the arm as if to pick a grape from a high vine: a reach and grasp movement that is coordinated with a mindful breath.

**Mindfulness-in-Action: Arrivals 5)** Balance on one leg. The tale of Hillel**:** To become a human requires a sense of self. A sense of self in its nature is self**ish**. Is it possible that a human sense of self can rise above and transcend its own selfish nature. Being kind to ones self.

**Mindfulness-in-Action: Arrivals 6) and 7)** To bring the opening session in the room of Healthy Action to a close we revisited two explorations from the session of the previous week:

***the blind partner led around the room with the call of their name extended by the use of a musical instrument to guide the process.***

***The one-step forward-one-step back a contemplative walk procedure.***

**In the room of GOOD SENSE**

**Mindfulness-in-Action: 8):** Oxygen and attention. Proprioception and the nourishment of touch

The skin as an anchor for attention in the experiencing self,

**Mindfulness-in-Action 8)** A 15 minute Mindfulness-in-Action exploration similar to last weeks' session:a guided awareness and movement ofattention around the global head to toe sensations from the skin.

**Reflections of the mysteries of the Self 1):** the sense of self

is so vital to our human lives ***yet it is totally unmeasurable and wholly undetectable*** by any scientific instrument. Neuro- science’s respect for the ancient Buddhist science of mind and self.

**Reflections on the mysteries of the Self 2)** Liking and disliking. Comfort and discomfort. Selected images.

**Reflections on the tissue life of stillness.**

**Mindfulness-in-Action 9): Zen Question Time**. Your Original Face? and other quests.

**Mindfulness-in-Action 10) Your Original Face and the Birthplace of a smile**

**COURSE NOTES**

***NOTE:*** *Due to a combination of other work commitments for some participants and a nasty virus that is going around, only three people were able to meet for the second session of the series. Two participants of the three had attended the first workshop. One new participant, joined the group for the 13 April class.*

**Mindfulness-in-Action: Arrivals 1**) Participants wandered round the Centre looking at the pictures hanging on the walls, selecting two images: ***one that you liked and one that you did not particularly feel drawn to.***

**In the room of HEALTHY ACTION:**

**Mindfulness-in-Action: Arrivals 2)** Walking with presence. This session took place upstairs in the Room of Healthy Action. We had walked to get here and we climbed the stairs. In this session we remembered that the nature of Mindfulness in Action practice is ***to awaken before it seeks to inform***. It is a presence in the experiencing self that needs to awaken. The controlling remembering self, the one that's always hungry for novelty and information is gently eased to one side for the moment.

We walked around the room and interweaved in complex dodging patterns. The invitation is to allow the mind the freedom to fully enter that into the complexity, indeed the mystery of how our body gains and loses poise as we walk and change direction through space. This was also an opportunity to recall from last week, an important sense of ***exploring from the bottom up***. A useful guiding thought for this is simply to be aware of your feet as we change direction and dodge around!

This movement through the space is brought to a still point in order to become aware of the subtle movements of balance in the upright standing body. We explore the sway of weight from one foot to the other and enter deeply into an awareness of the different sensations in the way that that each foot takes weight.

**Mindfulness-in-Action: Arrivals 3)** While standing with both feet firmly on the floor we start with an awareness of the sensations from sole of the foot. In this procedure we move systematically upwards from the feet in order to ’build’ the length of the tower of the standing body – as if we were building it from the floor upwards segment by segment. We start with the foot and then we proceed to add the shin bones; then the thigh bone; the length of the spine; the rib cage; the yoke of the arms and shoulders and finally the head on top of the column of the spine. This is a useful Mindfulness-in-Action procedure to fill in the dead time when standing in a queue for the supermarket or the ATM!

**Mindfulness-in-Action: Arrivals 4)** We intend to develop focus and discipline with our attention and to anchor it into an expanding awareness that is the province of the experiencing self. How in the moment, the body is supporting itself is such an ever present anchor, something we can bring attention to and enter more fully into the Present Moment. Another readily accessible experience is the ever present rise and fall of the breath. In this procedure together we explore both breath and support: in a lunge forward and reach with the arm as if to pick a grape from a high vine, a reach and grasp movement that is coordinated with a mindful breath.

**Arrivals 5) The key Mindfulness-in-Action challenge : *being kind to oneself.***

We continue to explore the gentle rhythm that sways weight from side to side so that occasionally we balance briefly on one leg.

As we do this the ancient tale of Hillel and his impatient pupil is retold. This is an example of one of the many ancient wisdom traditions of the world – they all seem to express the same idea only very slightly differently. The mindfulness-in-action version from last week was:

***"Before being kind to others, first be kind to yourself."***

This finds the same expression in the Buddhist call to unconditional kindness and compassion or the Christian admonition to love yourself before you love your neighbour. It does not matter which tradition, they all make much the same statement. None of them claim that this is easy! In the story of Hillel the impatient pupil is invoked after taking in the information into his remembering self, to then enter on the path of self questioning and study which may well be the proper province of the experiencing self.

Sigmund Freud the father of modern psychology made a very clear and uncompromising statement with regard to the difficulty of this invitation. Unambiguously he said: that ***it goes completely against the grain of human nature***! If you were born in Ireland you are Iri**sh.** If you are born in Britain you are Briti**sh.** To become a human requires a sense of self. A sense of self in its nature is self**ish**. Is it possible that a human sense of self can rise above and transcend its own selfish nature? It's not an easy question!

The Mindfulness in Action process offers not an answer but a framework from which to question and find out. The framework on offer here is the idea that there are two different selves: ***the remembering self or ego and the experiencing self which can be thought of as the mind-boggling complexity of the sensations of the present moment***. This is a springboard to explore and to dive into some profound questions. The remembering self is the storyteller and storyliner that creates arcs of connection from the past and the future of our lives. The experiencing self takes in the points of arrival and departure of these arcs into the enormously complex sensations of every living present moment. The Present Moment is all that we ever have in order to effectively learn from the past and to prepare for the future. The opening invitation of the April 13th session is simply to free the mind from the constraints of the remembering self and to immerse itself into the mystery and complexity of something as every-day and ordinary as how you walk:

**Mindfulness-in-Action: Arrivals 6) and 7)** To bring the opening session in the room of Healthy Action to a close we revisited two explorations from the session of the previous week:

***the 'blind' partner is led around the room with the call of their name was this time extended to the use of a musical instrument to guide the process.***

***The one step forward one step back contemplative walk procedure was explored as a 10 minute discipline of maintaining attention to the moving body and the experiencing self. An awareness is drawn to what happens, and it happens to us all, when the remembering self persistently interferes with the process by pulling attention away from the experience and into past or the future.***

**In the room of GOOD SENSE**

In this session we emphasised the skill and the discipline that is involved in maintaining attention to important aspects of the mighty river of sensation that flows through the present moment and the experiencing self. Before the procedure we talked about the skin and the extraordinary richness of sensation that flows from multiple points on the skin surface from head to toe. We considered how in very early infancy to skin is still able to breathe in oxygen. It is common practice to sometimes place premature babies into an oxygen tent where the premature baby is able to take him 20% of their oxygen needs through the skin. Later in the development of a child the organ of the skin plays a foundational role in the formation of a sense of one's self through the process of touch. The skin creates a natural boundary, an interface between what is ***me*** and what is ***not-me***. It is clearly recognised in developmental psychology that the skin and the nourishment of loving touch in particular, is a crucial and powerful sources of nourishment on a par with the nourishment of the food that we take in! Touch is vital to the developing sense of self.

The way that we may move attention from points on the skin surface is an accessible way to work with the experiencing self in order to deepen awareness of the volume and position that your body occupies in space. This is a key part of the body’s amazing proprioception system. "***Proprioception****"* means the sense of oneself as property -as something that belongs to you to yourself. It is truly amazing how we can extend and retract our attention like a telescope. This process is continually at work subconsciously to triangulate or position ourselves in space. It is a vital part of how we occupy the space of the room and how those positions relate one to one another in shared inter-personal space.

This discussion led into revisiting of the 15 minute mindful-in-action procedure as has been detailed in the notes from the first session.

**Mindfulness-in-Action: Moving attention in an interpersonal space.**

**The mysteries of the human self**

The human self is one of the greatest mysteries of the human condition. Without a fully fledged sense of oneself we fail to become completely human. Yet this entity, the sense of self that is so vital to our human lives ***is totally unmeasurable and wholly undetectable*** by any scientific instrument. We spoke about how the great Buddhist psychology that is 3000 years old is increasingly being respected by science and even accorded the status not of a religion but of a science of self and mind. The Mindfulness in Action procedures work in the spirit of finding of openness and work cooperatively from the bottom up, with the experienced self in order to observe the movements and thoughts that constitute the remembering self. In terms of Buddhist psychology the remembering self is the small self. The experiencing self is referred to as No-self.

**Mindfulness-in-Action: Liked and disliked images:**

In the room of GOOD SENSE we considered the images selected from the walls of the centre – one that attracted you and one that you didn't particularly like. Through a process of mindful self-observation you are asked to attend within yourself to the opening movements of like and the closing, protective movements of dislike. Are similar movements involved in feelings of comfort and discomfort?

You are asked at some later point in the workshop to revisit those images with an attention to these observations in mind. As you observe through these movements through the experiencing self, i***s it possible to bring something of liking and attraction to the disliked image and to bring some aspects of the feeling of repulsion and disliking to the image that you liked?***

**Some reflections on the differences between the remembering self and the experiencing self**

We tend to like and be drawn to certainties in the thinking of the remembering self and we tend to dislike and even pull back in fear from uncertainties. Characteristically the thinking of the remembering self particularly likes to fix and position things and will tend to cast things in terms of ***polarities*** such as good and bad, like and dislike. The experiencing self does not work with such judgement and polarisation. The opening movements of like and the closing movements of dislike are of equal interest! The experiencing self embraces, flux change and flow= in many ways the opposite a fixity and of certainty. It comes very naturally to the remembering self to seek ***end-results*** and establish a fixity and a certainty that is orientated towards answers and ready solutions. In this way it characteristically tends to work from ***the top down.*** The experiencing self on the other hand perpetually operates in an open and questing state of awe and wonder. Such a profound sense of wonder is a profound feature of our early childhood experience, when the sense of self is in a state of formation. Consider when you saw a cat for the very first time. You take in the cat wholly and fully through the sense portals of sight, sound and of smell. It is clear that we have an experiencing self that is primary and foundational to the establishment of the ego and the remembering self.

As the skill with mindfulness practice develops becomes clear the extent to which the thought of the experiencing self is an open and questioning state. It doesn't think ***about*** things about action – it goes into them and becomes a part of them. In this way the experiencing self embodies **BEING** and the remembering self is about **DOING.** So much of our everyday experience in contemporary life is locked into a busy doing, top-down, habit locked state. This forms part of the incessantly busy busy "getting there" - a sense of continuously being pulled towards some end goal or aim. In this state we are pulled by the nose through life – far too busy to question something as fixed and as certain as the habitual way that your foot leaves the support of the floor as we hurry from A to B.

**Mindfulness-in-Action: Zen Question Time**

In the next Mindfulness-in-Actionsession we returned too how various questions could be allowed to resonate and resound in your inner space of your experiencing self. Part of the task is to observe what happens within the remembering self in response to the questions.

Before we proceeded with the Questions we considered the way of questioning from the venerable Japanese Zen tradition that involve what are called ***“Koans”.*** The well-known unanswerable question: ***‘what is the sound of one hand clapping?’*** is particularly designed to resonate and create the questioning state of wonder so characteristic of the thinking of the experiencing self.

We went through some of the questions posed last week and began with a Zen like question:

***"What was your original face in the moment just before you were conceived?"***

After going through the questions we reaffirmed the invitation that as you listen to the questions even when you know the answer you observe your own reactions carefully. The basic framework for these explorations is to settle comfortably and to greet each question as it resounds with: ***"I do not know. Perhaps it is possible that together we could act and think in order to ascertain and find out***.”

**A closing reflection:**

*The open state of ascertaining and of discovering must if you think about it, always come first. It is obvious that we must first ascertain before we can move in to the certainties that the remembering self so likes and clings onto!*

**In the room of HEALTHY ACTION:**

In Mindfulness in action practices we intend to open up and explore ***the activity-in-stillness and the stillness-in-activity.*** Each one of these up and stop a different way to explore using the experiencing self. Finding ***stillness-in-activity*** involves a disciplined attention to the dynamics involved in observing the stillness of poise in the activity of for example, lifting your foot from the floor in an habitual walking step. In this session we explored something different: finding ***the activity-in-stillness*** in the stillness process itself. This kind of questioning and self observation takes us deep into the ancient wisdom that continually invokes us to ***stillness and silence.*** We work lying down on the floor and deliberately try to zero and neutralise any demands on balance support or movement. Our intervention is now to explore the ***neuro***- side of the ***neuro-***muscular or mind-body interrelationship.

**The tissue-life of stillness and silence**

A call to stillness is a central axis of most ancient wisdom traditions which contain many practices that still the mind and to awaken the heart. This kind of questioning and of observing addresses the question:

***"What is the “tissue life” of stillness and silence?***

***“How does stillness find expression in the body?***

***“What is the link between bringing the body into a poised state of stillness and finding peace and tranquility in the mind?”***

In preparation for the final procedure we considered in wonder how every single moment of life involves a completely new and different configuration of muscle contractions. These muscle contractions are figure-grounded against the backdrop of other muscle fibres that are currently in the process of release. The moment by moment changing patterns never exactly repeat the same configuration. Nonetheless these patterns do have recurring shapes and outlines. These are likened to the changing pattern of the stars in the night sky that twinkle and pattern themselves and form shapes like the Great Bear all the Plough. By analogy such twinkling patterns of muscle contraction constitute our familiar everyday habits. It is important to realise that they always pattern themselves out against the backdrop of the ongoing process of muscles restoring themselves through the process of release. This can be seen as a complex ever changing pattern of context and content as the twinkling patterns change shift against the background context of the enabling and healing recharge of muscles that are currently in the process of release.

Silence and stillness are recurrent theme in all the great wisdom traditions and have a central axis in Mindfulness-in-Action practice. To begin this session we considered that when a muscle fibre fires and contracts that this is a destructive and a metabolically costly event. We also drew attention to the fact that that it makes a noise. The event of a muscle releasing and healing itself is a process that is silent. In this way the inner noise of muscle contractions is always taking place against the still silent backdrop of the muscles that are released. The invitation is to focus on the context backdrop. We only see the stars against the backdrop of the night sky, even though they are still there in the daylight. By analogy we need to focus attention on the backdrop of release. In this way the experiencing self can participate in the inner life that is the tissue life of silence and stillness.

The last procedure of the workshop probes into that question:

***"What was your original face in the moment just before you were conceived?"***

We are about to explore through a process of release an entry into the muscles of the face that form an important part of the mask of the personality of the remembering self. The origin of the word "personality" means that which sounds through ("s***onare")*** the mask of the expressive face. The origin of the word “***personality”*** comes from a Roman preoccupation with masked balls and events. Because the masks that covered the face muffled the voice, the Roman masks had a tiny the little mega-phone device so that the voice could ***sound through*** the mask. Hence ***“Per-sonare”*** or “***personality.”***

A slightly different way to introduce this exploration might take the form of another question:

***"Where is the birth of a smile?"***

Before we began this Mindfulness-in-Action procedure we considered something of the enigmatic mystery of human smile. It takes barely half a muscle: the zygomaticus major by name the face to smile. Interestingly it takes 23 muscles or more to draw the human brow into a furrowed frown. Saving energy and expending energy wisely constitute proper mindfulness concerns. So a great slogan is:

***Smile it saves your energy!***

We also considered how psychologists have calculated that the average child smiles over 400 times a day while the average adult is lucky to put in more than a dozen. So - whatever has happened to us to wipe that energy-conserving smile off our faces.

**Mindfulness-in-action procedure 10) : *exploring the birth of a smile and your “Original Face”.***

This powerful practice will be reprised to open the third Mindfulness-in-Action workshop this Thursday when more people will be able to attend. A more detailed account will appear in the notes for the third session.

**THIRD SESSION: 21 April 2016**

**Summary**

1) Ancient and Modern: Reflection on two horses pulling the chariot of Life - the Willing Horse and the Wilful Horse.

2)Looking with Presence: liked and disliked images.

3) In the Room of Openness:

* Greeting and welcoming/Arriving
* African stamping and clapping, welcome song ‘Gwee-jah-lee-lay, Step Step Stamp Stamp'

4) In the Room of Healthy Action:

* Throw Catch. Movement and Interaction
* 10 minute standing meditation
* Listening loudly: Connecting brain between the ears with the brain below the ears
* Walking with Presence: 10 minute contemplative procedure

5) In the Room of Good Sense:

* Reflections on the embryonic origins of your skin
* 20 minute meditation: On skin as an interface between inside-space and outside-space
* Zen Questions: Your original face. Why is it so difficult to be kind to oneself?

6) In the Room of Healthy Action:

* Paying attention to the tissue life of stillness
* 30 minutes lying down mediation: “On the birthplace of a smile”.
* Farewell: The first and last sound: Ahhh!

**Course notes**

*On 21 April five people met for Session 3. In this session one new individual joined us.*

**In the Room of Openness**

**Ancient and Modern: Reflections on two horses that pull the chariot of Life.**

An idea from the great wisdom traditions of Ancient Greece was outlined. In Ancient Greece a human life was considered to be like a chariot pulled by two great horses. The horses are different in significant ways, so different in fact, that they don't really know each other sufficiently to pull together and so haul the chariot in a straight forward course. Without the necessary direction and guidance from the reins of the skilled charioteer, the chariot will tend to forever slew around chaotically in circles. So, from the venerable and advanced psychophysical culture of Ancient Greece we have a powerful metaphor: The idea of a skilled and mindful charioteer that draws upon all that is the noblest and highest of our human capacities. The charioteer could be considered to be the Pre-Frontal lobes of the human brain, the Inner Wise Guide, the Watcher, the Invigilator.

The two ancient Greek horses could be taken to represent ***the Remembering Self*** and ***the Experiencing Self*** as we have explored them earlier in the course-series. The horse of the Remembering Self is by nature ***will***ful, dominating, controlling. It wants to win, to prevail; it wants to be in total charge of the haulage of the chariot. The Remembering Self is the Ego, the small self and most of all ***it embodies the storyteller and story-liner,*** the one that connects past and future into coherent, meaningful life scripts. It is indeed a ***Will***full Horse - an expression of the human ***will that*** wants to drive and strive and to push, force, strain, exert. No wonder it doesn't want to know its partner in harness alongside it: the Willing Horse of the Experiencing Self! This Willing Horse of the Experiencing Self also expresses a different aspect of human ***will***, expressed this time as ***will***ingness. The Willing Horse of the Experiencing Self is servile, happy to just stand there and be, experiencing the flow of the extra-ordinary richness of Now and the Present Moment -even if the Willful Horse is dragging it around in circles. The Experiencing Self represents the Greater Self that is always at peace wit and in a state of total acceptance with the present moment.

Consider how crazily the chariot would veer and career around if either horse is seriously underdeveloped or injured. If the Willful Horse is never properly or fully developed we are terrifyingly trapped in the present moment, overwhelmed by the raging chaotic torrent. This would be the equivalent of childhood autism. Closer to my own harrowing experience is the terrible suffering of my demented mother as her Remembering-self collapsed and fell apart 'in harness' in her nether years. The other and the opposite imbalance comes frighteningly close to our current cultural imbalance in which the ***Willful Horse thinks that it is in total control of the chariot of Life***. This is a major cause of a huge hunk of human suffering: ***the Willing Horse thinks that it controls Life. It does not***! It controls ideas and stories about life and how your life should be. This perpetuation of grand scale suffering could be seen in terms of extreme pathology as the cold, callous, sometimes brutal manipulations of the fascistic personality, the sociopath with no connection to the warmth and empathy of life in the present moment of the Experiencing Self and of other Experiencing Selves. Apparently 60 percent of the world's leaders of political and global corporations have sociopathic personalities!

From Ancient Greek wisdom emanates a call to balance and this has many resonant echoes from other wisdom traditions such as ***the Middle Way:*** the tranquility and equilibrium invoked by Buddhist psychology. But to stay for now with the ancient Greek metaphor: ***to become fully human we need to engage the highest aspects of ourselves*: a Mindful Wise Guide to steer- *not to drive* the chariot*.*** The attentive highest level skill of the charioteer can harness and take command of ***BOTH*** **a mindful and worldly knowledgeable Brain *(the Remembering Self*) and the Wise Intuitive and Awakened Heart (*The Experiencing Self)*.**

Consider now the possibility that our current cultural plight is perhaps not 'out-there’ but reflected within us right now: a state where the Willful Horse veers around in an utterly chaotic way. That may represent within us that drivenness to gather more and more worldly knowledge and control. Could it be that this Willful horse needs from the charioteer, a firm bridling back in order to then proceed to awaken the power and eventually, the evenness of pull from the somewhat servile and “unpushy” Willing Horse: ***Mindfulness-in-Action awakens before it informs***.

Though meek and servile nonetheless, this is the horse that is so full of awe, curiosity and questioning and most of all true healing power and potential.

So maybe here we have a way to reflect on contemporary inner struggles and suffering as observed through the ancient lens of a highly developed and psycho-physically advanced Ancient Greek culture. Ancient and modern come together in the contemporary idea that we embody two selves: the Remembering Self and the Experiencing Self. This actually comes from the latest most up-to-date science - an idea put forward recently by cognitive psychologist Daniel Hahnemann. Ancient Wisdom and modern science and modern flowing together are a key feature of Mindfulness in Action practice.

In this series of Mindfulness-in-Action workshops we are exploring, finding out and most of all we are questioning by looking within, whether these two selves each have their own distinctive form of human thinking, of human cognition. As this unfolds there may be a question here so simple and obvious that we might miss it all together: ***Does one of these forms of thought have an appropriate first thing priorit***y? Perhaps this question might resonate through Session Four?

**In The Room of Openness**

After checking-out with liked and disliked images on the walls throughout Bashful Alley Centre, we went through a Mindfulness-in-Action arrivals procedure. This one is borrowed from a Tanzania African tradition: ***“Gwee-Jah-Lee-lay” means*** "Welcome Everyone!”. The feet, which make a shared rhythm, echo the syllables of the words: “step step stamp stamp”. We are moving together and sharing also a breathing rhythm in order to chant the syllables. This is a free and easy way that natural living peoples the world over use to ensure that the newcomer, the stranger in town feels welcomed and is soon feeling at home in the community.

**In The room of Healthy Action**

**In this session we revisited and elaborated upon for procedures from earlier sessions (see earlier notes for greater detail):**

**¥ The throw and catch game.**  This lively interactive game also has an African origin “.Jeek-ah-lee-lay” means: “Everyone turnaround!”

**¥ A Mindfulness-in-Action 10 minute procedure**: The Toppling Tower standing meditation. We retell Hillel’s ancient admonition regarding “First be kind to oneself” and self questioning for the newcomer.

**¥ A Mindfulness-in-Action 10 minute procedure:** Listening Loudly. A fast-track way to experience an ancient alertness, and an awakening connection between the brain-between-the ears and the-brain-below-the-ears. We use the calling of a name or the sound of a musical instrument to guide a blind-fold partner through the space.

**¥ A Mindfulness-in-Action 10 minute procedure:** Walking with mindful presence. This exercise invites the discipline of maintaining attention to the Experiencing Self and in particular, to the complex process that lifts the foot from the floor and returns it back to the floo**r.**

**In The Room of Good Sense**

**After a 10 minute settling-into-your-sitting-posture Mindfulness Meditation procedure:**  *we reviewed the fascinating embryonic origins of the skin as it develops from the ectoderm: the outer layer of the rapidly developing ball of cells that was you as a Conceptus at around 3 or 4 days after conception. This discussion delves deeper into an ongoing exploration of how nerves and synapses* ***mediate between the interaction between the insides and outsides the body****. The sense of the skin as the organ of the brain that finds out and interacts with the world around us, and the importance of the skin and touch in the development of the human self were again emphasized. This was followed by:*

**¥ A 20 minute guided meditation:**  On the sensations of the skin in the present moment as a key interface between the space-within and the outside space. This exploration deepened the meditation from the session 2 in the earlier series. *(For more detailed notes see the notes from Session 2.)*

**¥ Raindrops:** The session in the room of Good Sense was rounded out by a delightful procedure in which we work with a partner and use fingertip touches somewhere on the skin surface while the partner who is receiving the fingertip touch keeps eyes closed in order to maintain a sense of connection with the Experiencing Self and to the all-important and sensory rich touch sense.

**Zen Question Time?**  We allowed various questions again to resonate within the Experiencing Self in order to be very vigilance and watchful of the reactions from the Remembering Self. There are different types of question and very different types of reaction to observe. We return to the question: “What was your original face the moment before conception?” -and the question: *Why is it so difficult to be kind to oneself*? We are not reactively grabbing for answers here -simply allowing a resonant space for the questions.

**In The room of Healthy Action**

Th**e final exploration in session 3)** Webegan with a review of the way that Mindfulness-in-Action explores ***the activity-in-stillness*** and ***the stillness-in-activity.*** *(N.B Please see notes from previous session for more details.)*

*It is perfectly possible to mentally rehearse actions without actually doing them. This forms an important part of our human capacity to form in our minds intentions and so- to plan for future actions. No doubt in our evolutionary past it formed the basis for the cutting edge in evolution that we so successfully forged. It allowed us amongst other things, to forward plan and to effectively strategize our actions in the hunt.*

*Going through actions mentally – in your head is explored in this procedure. It illustrates a broader principle in the way that Mindfulness-in-action procedures set about discovering the* ***neuro****-activity in* **stillness***. The stillness we aim to tune into in this procedure is really the silent backdrop of muscles as they release. This forms the background of silence against which the noise of muscle contraction is continually played out.*

*Your attention is drawn to the fact that* ***while your brain occupies 1 or 2 percent of total body weight; it draws upon 25% of the total metabolic cost of running the whole body****. A simple reflection:* ***there are no muscles in your brain****. So all the neuro-activity, drawing as it does upon a huge amount of energy is not “doing” something in any sense of burning muscle energy. This is neuro-energy. The activity is observable -but only at very highest levels of mindful awareness!*

**Floor-work: The activity-in-stillness: A 30 minute in-depth exploration: On your Original face/The birthplace of a smile.**

We begin by lying on a mat on the floor in a position of support for the whole length of your body. In this exploration of the activity-in-stillness we aim as much as possible to zero and neutralize any demands on the muscular activities of balance support and movement.

You are invited to observe any muscle activity as like the twinkling of stars in the night sky. The backdrop of the night sky is likened to the background that is always present, that involves muscles that are currently released hungry recharge themselves. The process of muscle release is a silent event. There are always unconscious tensions inner “noise” of which we are unaware. Our aim and intention in this procedure is to discover in particular, the subtle holdings and tensions in the muscles that form the face. This can be thought of as the mask or the social face of the persona.

***Are these tensions present in the moment before we awaken from sleep?***

***Is there a moment when the social face assembles itself as we come to awakening and begin our waking day?***

Your attention in the present moment is drawn to the right-hand index finger. You are invited to allow your consciousness to spread to an awareness of the exact position of that finger. Already that thought alone will have occasioned the activity of millions of cascades of nerves and synapses that snap crackle and pop into action as information and energy whizzes around within the Distributed Nervous System. The Experiencing Self takes in these tingling and enlivening sensations. Life lies in the present moment. The sensations of the present moment are always contained within the receptacle or vessel of the body.

You are now ask to imagine- purely in your mind, the movement that your right-hand index finger would make if it were to now lift the length of the arm to shoulder height with your right hand index finger pointing up towards the ceiling. Next, imagine in as much detail as possible, the arc that your finger might make through space in order to come down and to touch a point right in the middle of your forehead. This is the spot where Indian ladies often have a red dot. In that culture the red dot represents the third-eye, which is thought to be located in the Pineal Gland, which is directly behind that red spot in the middle of the forehead. It is a spot just above the place where a frown gathers in the brow.

You are about to be invited to mentally go through a series of strokes from the middle of your brow and out over the right side of your face and the upper part of your skull. Eventually during the procedure you will be asked to move progressively down the midline of the face, from the forehead, moving down the midline of the face and to continue to imagine the finger stroking across and around the right half of the globe of the head.

We start now in the middle of the Forehead. The finger traces over the region of a midline parting through the hair and continues by returning to the same middlebrow point and moving down the right side of the gentle curve of your skull. The probing finger discovers tension in the scalp. Releasing that tension can be like slackening the skin of a drum. When that right-hand index finger eventually comes to a point when it now strokes horizontally from the midbrow-spot and out across the temples, it is time to drop a little down the midline of the face to a point where a frown gathers as it furrows the brow. From this point the finger traces out a line across the right eyebrow and around the scalp. The aim is to discover and release any tension in the muscles that lift the right eyebrow.

Next move down from the centre of the frown drop down a little to the very top of the bridge of the nose: to a place where a pair of glasses sits comfortably. The imaginary stroking action of the right-hand index finger now takes in, first, the upper eyelid and then, the lower eyelid. The eyelids contain a delicate tracery of horizontally organized fibres. If they are released then the eyelids will drape comfortably over the eyeball. At this point the right-hand index finger probes even deeper. There are six suspensory muscles around the eyeball. Often these muscles are caught in an unconscious tension. In its most extreme form it becomes a hard staring glare! If these muscles are allowed to release it is possible to feel, as these muscles release, the weight of the eyeball and to experience the feeling of soft space at the back of the eye. Released in this way you might experience an incipient slight movement as the eye moves towards the outer part of the eye socket. This forms the ***"twinkle in the eye” that is the birthplace of a genuine smile***! The suspensory muscles of the eye also have an intimate connection with deep subtle musculature deep at the back of the skull - at the place where the top of the column of the spine attaches to the underside part of the skull. Releasing the eyeball can open and release these muscles that are rich in sensory nerve endings. They will free your neck in the deepest way possible from unconscious holding! It can create a real champagne feeling of lightness and ease!

Next we move to a midline point in the middle of the nose. An outward stroke across the right cheek can guide a sequence of releases that will allow the powerful cheek muscles to release and drape up and over the cheekbone. This creates a slight lifting the facial muscles. Again all part of the outward ripples of a smile! In a fascinating way it links to an outward opening ripple that emanates out from that eye-twinkle of release from where a smile is born.

Proceeding to move down the midline: next we imagine the right hand and index finger touching the tip of the nose. It then traces out along the right nostril and over the lower cheek. Consider your nostrils as being like “nose wings” that lift in order to welcome and smile in each breath. In this way each non-doing breath is welcomed with a smile!

Moving down we engage with the area in the middle of the ridge between the nostrils and the upper lip. A sideways stroke to the right releases tension in the upper teeth and lips. As with all these movements of release from the midline, they allow the face to fall open. This openness is the natural state – an experience of the original face? This is the face of awe and wonder in a young child?

We proceed with the release across the upper and the lower lip and we maybe notice that the process creates an imperceptible lift in the corner of the right hand lips. Perhaps if forms the essence of the enigmatic Mona Lisa smiles so famously captured by the genius of Leonardo!

This particular Mindfulness-in-Action exploration finishes in the midline: right in the middle of the dimple that forms in the middle of the chin. A final stroke across the right-hand side will take in the right-hand side of the jaw and once again promote a softening release of the jaw.

The exploration of the release right-hand side of the face ends with by bringing the attention back from behind the mask to the outside world.

The right-hand index finger lifts to shoulder height and returns to its place lying by your side.

***The second half of the procedure is exactly the same. This time we are using the left-hand index finger to open from the midline of the face on the left-hand side.***

**Final closing procedure:**  The sound of all our voices together making what is perhaps the first and last sound in our lives: Ahhh!

**FOURTH SESSION: 28 April 2016**

**Summary**

**In the Room of Healthy Action**

**Arrivals/Departures/Where we are now? *Where have we been? Where are we going?***

Most of all, of course: ***Where are we now. Routines/Habits/Change***

**An ‘Arrivals” Moment of Stillness:**

**Departures**.

The first and last sound: ***Ahhh.***

**Mindfulness- in-Action Game: *head-shoulders-knees-toes-eyes-ears-mouth and nose. The Power of Won’t!*** Perhaps children intuitively know what they need to playfully develop their frontal lobe capacity!

**Mindfulness- in-Action Game: Throw Catch “Jeek-a lee-lay”:** The game that has started off all the earlier sessions**.**

**Mindfulness- in-Action Body awareness Procedure:** “The Toppling Tower”

**In the Room of Good Sense:**

**REFLECTIONS**:“Blowing out the picture of a candle”

**A Mindfulness -in-Action breathing awareness procedure**: The suspensory transitional moment between the end of the out-breath and the start of the in-breath.

**A reflection on developmental embryology.** The Limbic System

In this session we delve a little deeper into what happens a little further on -after the three or four days after the moment of conception…

**Mindfulness in action procedure:** the Pie Diagram that expresses the proportion of Being in relation to Doing

**A 15-minute Mindfulness-in-Action procedure**: “May I be safe and well. May others around me be also safe and well”

**In the Room of Healthy Action**

**A 10-minute Mindfulness-in-Action procedure:** A demonstration of the power of Non-doing to initiate change in the tissue and fabric of the body**.**

**A 30-minute Mindfulness-in-Action “Activity-in-Stillness” Procedure:** The five “animals” in the Inner Wilderness

**A Farewell Pygmy Song**

**Course notes**

*Five participants all of whom had attended previously, met together for the fourth Mindfulness-in-Action Workshop session on Thursday 27 April 2016.*

**In the Room of Healthy Action**

**Arrivals/Departures/Where we are now? *Where have we been? Where are we going?***

Most of all, of course: ***Where are we now***? We approach the halfway mark in the six weekly sessions.

We begin by remembering where we have just come from: our journey here today.

**Arrivals**

We consider whether our journeys today were routine. Was there something especially different about the journey here today? We are especially interested in some of the mysteries of human attention. We seem to be especially attuned t***o attend to what changes*** around us, what it is that is different. This morning the beautiful healthy golden hair of a young girl on the station platform struck my attention. Every hair was so subtly and slightly different from the other. Sometimes and like us all, I see and perceive through a filter of categories and concepts. I see in abstraction not through the Experiencing Self, but top-down, through the concepts of the Remembering Self. However like the leaves on the tree and indeed every breath we breathe, every hair, every leaf, every tree is in fact subtly different. It is absolutely necessary to our humanness that we do develop the capacity to categorize things and that the Remembering Self is able to filter out, to simplify and abstract from the richness of our experience. After all, that is how we are able to organize and learn from the past and plan and anticipate for the future.

The sheer volume of sensation apparent to the Experiencing self is overwhelming to the limited processing capacity in the cortex of the Remembering Self. Even something as seemingly simple as drawing attention to how you lift your foot from the floor could easily create a helpless feeling in the Remembering Self -such that it becomes somewhat like the centipede in the ditch bewildered by the complex decision as to which of its many legs to begin to crawl wit**h!**

**An ‘Arrivals” Moment of Stillness:**

The moment of still reflection on our arrival for the session and our remembering of the journey here are extended to consider Linda’s tender sadness: Linda’s mother died later on Thursday 27th April. In the tragic circumstances of course, Linda was unable to attend this session. Our thoughts however, are with her and her sad time of final farewells.

**Departures**.

Where were we when we last met together a week ago? We were moving mindfully around the space with what we might consider to be our first and our last sound: ***Ahhh.*** It is good that the departing sound, when we left last week, was not the sound of one voice but the sound of all our voices resounding together.

We begin where we left off last week, only this time as we move around to warm up, we also make the sound: ***“Ahhh”*** - but this time it is unvoiced. This does not mean that there is no sound because the sound, and it still happens on the out-breath makes a barely audible sighing whispered sound. Eventually we add to that just the modicum of voice. This creates something like the sigh of relief we occasionally make when we set down a heavy bag that we've been carrying around town. We often carry around with us the burden of a great deal of unconscious tension. Often when we release that tension it is greeted with just such a sigh of relief and indeed, when we let go in this way it is exactly the same as setting down a burden, the weight that we have been unnecessarily carrying - up to the moment of setting it down and that sigh that accompanies the releasing of the tensions of carrying the load.

**Mindfulness- in-Action Game:**

Young children inhabit their bodies in a full and physical way. Kids especially love games that involve the game participants having to stay nailed to the present moment because you have to monitor ***not doing something***. In contemporary neuroscience this is thought to exercise perhaps the highest function that has evolved in the human brain: it is sometimes referred to as: ***the Power of Won’t!*** Perhaps children intuitively know what they need to playfully develop their frontal lobe capacity!

Children love combining singing and gesture and the *Head-shoulder-knees-and toes game* is a fine example. We start with the gestures and the song. As we sing out the part of the anatomy, we touch in a head-to-toe order: ***head-shoulders-knees-toes-eyes-ears-mouth and nose***. Once having established the groove of the gestures and song, the ***not-doing*** part of the game begins in earnest. We cycle through each verse, but progressively we continue to touch the body part but this time we have to leave out that part of the song. It’s tricky!!

Someone commented at the end of the game that I got it wrong! I usually do. A key part of Mindfulness practice is to be aware of how judgment creates an inner discomfort and tension associated with not getting things right. This is part of how we get caught up in a top-down processing. We fear getting things wrong, uncertainty and not knowing things! That’s why the Questions Session is such a key bottom-up Mindfulness-in Action practice!

**Mindfulness- in-Action Game: Throw Catch “Jeek-a lee-lay”:** The game that has started off all the earlier sessions**.**

**Mindfulness- in-Action Body awareness Procedure:** “The Toppling Tower”. In this session we developed a procedure that was presented in earlier sessions. In this session we also revisit Hillel and the particular difficulty associated with being kind to oneself- and standing on one leg!

We end the Arrivals and Departures session with a lively and enlivening walk- with-presence session as we dodge around each other in the space.

**In the Room of Good Sense:**

We begin with this session with a Mindfulness-in-Action stillness-orientated procedure and an invitation to fully inhabit the sitting or lying down posture of the body. On the table a candle burns and as we sit together we direct a steady stream of breath towards the candle -as if to attempt to blow it out. After a minute or two of focused breath work, we take a moment to reflect and remember that throughout the entire spectrum of our lives with all of its gladness, sadness and it's madness, from the greatest orgasmic pleasures to the most intense pain, throughout moments of dreadful and boring ennui, through moments that are most exciting and riveting times in our lives, throughout all of this experience and through every moment up until this one: ***we have breathed!*** And hey!! We continue to breathe we are sometimes blasé about this but if you think about it: that we have successfully breathed through it all … all our lives and arrived here…. this is wonderful, special – inspiring**.**

**Where have we been?**

We review at this point, some key aspects of the Mindfulness-in-Action practices that we have explored on the course so far. We have considered how we might come to know ourselves, and ***the Remembering self and the Experiencing self:*** We have explored the possibility that the **Remembering Self** is the self that becomes the repository of story and narratives, the guardian of the past and the planner for the future; and **the Experiencing Self** that is the repository of life as it flows like a raging torrent of sensations that moment by moment courses through the present moment.

These two selves that we embody have been likened to two great horses: the Willing Horse and the Willful Horse. The two horses of the human will need special direction from the charioteer of the mind, if they are to pull forward evenly. Without a mindful and skillful charioteer to find this balance, then our lives inevitably go round and round in chaotic circles. We need to wake up the Willing Horse and this involves ***first*** reining back the Willful Horse, the one that charges ever onward in life, quite certain and convinced that it is in total charge and control of our life. This is an illusion and a delusion ***because life only exist in the present moment of the Experience Self***. The Experiencing Self totally knows of this! The Remembering Self is NOT in control of life but of ***ideas and stories particularly about how life should be***. The Remembering Self generates inner tensions and frustrations whenever life fails to deliver what the Remembering Self thinks life should be like. These form by far the greater part of the huge burden of human suffering. A very important Mindfulness-in-Action process involves observing intently the likes and the dislikes and the contortions and manipulations of comfort and discomfort in the Remembering Self.

We considered how easily we might come to make great efforts to blow out what is in effect the picture of a candle. The representation of the burning candle might be so convincing and realistic. Consider it as if it were as completely convincing as a three-dimensional holographic image. You blow hard, but of course the candle does not get blown out! It is not a real candle after all! However the failure may only add to the sense that: “You are getting it wrong again, John” what you need to do - is to again blow - but ever harder. By an uncanny coincidence as we talk about attending to what is real in order to blow out the candle, the candle in the room, the one that we were attempting to blow out earlier blew out all by itself! This occasions uproarious laughter. Part of what is particularly humorous is that I had been so engrossed in my presentation that I had failed to notice the uncanny coincidence. Who am I to lead a mindfulness class?

**A Mindfulness -in-Action breathing awareness procedure:**

**T**his procedure, as with most Mindfulness-in-Action procedures, challenges your attention to anchor itself in the present moment. In this instance we achieve this by paying attention to that ***suspensory transitional moment between the end of the out-breath and the start of the in-breath***. As we explore this, the invitation here is also to intently observe the shenanigans of the Remembering Self, whenever it attempts to pull your attention away from the present centred task in hand. We all lose it at times in this way! Whenever this happens it is very important not to be judgmental with yourself, but to smile inwardly and to greatly appreciate ***that life creates each breath so that it arrives with an obliging reboot option***! It really does not matter - because we can begin again the next time round in the rhythm of the breath: focusing on the experience in the present moment and all that is happening as the current out-breath changes to become the out breath. “Ahhh”…Until our lives are finally over, this obliging possibility is ever accessible! It is easy for your Remembering Self to regard your breath in the same mundane way, and with the same quality of thought that sees only the concept of leaves, of trees or of hair. In fact no breath is ever the same as another! The challenge here is to immerse oneself in the flow and the complexity of each unique breath –that is the essence of the Experiencing Self**.**

**Mindfulness in action procedure: the Pie Diagram that expresses the proportion of Being in relation to Doing**

A particular question resounds throughout this practice as we look at a circle on the wall: ***if that circle were to represent the whole of you and your life, then what proportion of the circle would constitute the things that you can do and make happen. The remainder of the circle constitutes all the things within the whole that you cannot do all make happen.***

As we go through this procedure you are guided to consider the Non-doing things that you cannot make happen: Consider the act of falling asleep or falling in love for that matter. Clearly these are things that, in the nature of things, the more you try to make happen, the more resolutely they do not! Consider the third or so of your life when you are asleep and the complex repair and replenishment processes that predominate while we are asleep. We consider how these repair and replenishment processes also go on through the process of release during wakefulness and reflect on the fact that these are also things that you cannot make it happen. Then there is your entire visceral life. Thank goodness you do not have to run your own liver, beat your own heart, or worry about all the enzymes that have to be released at the appropriate times for your digestive system to work. There are even aspects of balance that seem to fall into the Non-doing portion of the Proportion-Pie, since the more you try and make balance happen, the more likely is that you will fall over! We have already considered in earlier sessions the complex and ongoing process of the release of muscle tensions. Clearly you do not make this happen – although certainly, you can at times, undo whatever stopping things being so tense!

Having enquired deeply into it you are then invited to take out of the slice of the pie: all that you can do and all that you can control. Perhaps our estimates are overgenerous. However whatever your estimate is, it is bound to come out that most of the circle is taken up with events within the whole over which you have no control – you do not make them happen. One way we might summarize this is to think of the pie-diagram ***in terms of Being and Doing.*** The small “Doing” portion contains the Remembering Self, which labours under the delusion that it is in control of everything. The “Being” portion that is appreciated by the Experiencing Self knows that the Remembering Self is not in control and that this is a delusion of the little self or the ego.

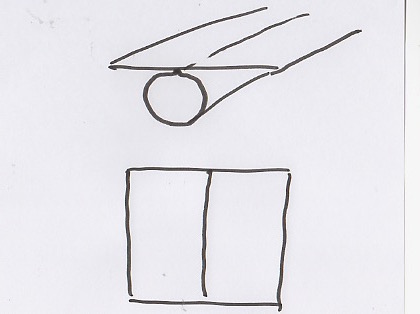
**The Inner Wilderness:**

If we think of the inner environment of the body as landscape, then the Non-doing or Being portion could be considered to be the inner wilderness. The origin of the word “wild” is Nordic: *“vilde”* For the eighth century Vikings the ***“Vilde***" constituted areas of landscape that were ***not*** under the domination and control of mankind: where animals and plants thrived and survived without the intervention of humankind. This definition is very apt way of thinking about Non-doing and in particular how the tiny Doing portion of the circle can come into a constructive relationship with greater proportion that is Being. Under what circumstances is it possible for the tiny proportions that contains the Remembering Self to enter into the Inner Wilderness? A moment’s reflective thought reveals that to enter into this territory we must leave a lot of baggage behind at the frontier. To enter into the “***Vilde***” of the inner wilderness we must first of all jettison all that the Remembering Self aspires to in terms of domination, manipulation and control. The analogy with forming a relationship with little natural wilderness that remains around us is very revealing. In the final procedure we will consider how important it is to become very still and watchful in the wilderness. As in the external wild territories it is important that we become still in order that the creatures of the wilderness may begin to reveal themselves to us!

**A reflection on developmental embryology**

In this session we delve a little deeper into what happens a little further on -after the three or four days after the moment of conception. Last week we considered how this extraordinary embryonic development reveals the origin and function of your skin. How the ectodermic or outer layer is formed on the outside of the developing ball of cells, and then how these outer layer of cells invaginate in a complex folding inward process that eventually becomes the central nervous system and brain- enabling it to develop deep in the inside of the developing structure. We place the fingers and thumbs of our hands together to make a ball shape to represent the ball of cells. Then we roll the fingers inward, curling the ball of the thumb into the palm of a hand as we make a fist shape with each hand and bring them together knuckle to knuckle. The fingernails then represent the developing brain. There is an important simplicity to be gleaned from considering this process: the origin of every neuron, and there are 500 billion of them in your brain, began at the surface interface between you as a ball of exploding cell growth, and the womb outside. ***All the 500 billion neurons in your brain began life and are still dedicated to modulating the relationship between inside and outsi***de. They form cosmically complex communication networks to interact with the outside world and to also look after the complex domestic process of looking after and maintaining the inner environment of the body. In a way the pinnacle of human development that is the conscious Remembering Self is a but a very complex version of the same process, based as it is on the formation of a boundary or interface between what is Me and what is Not me. Important as this boundary or frontier is to our humanness, it is a made-up fiction of the human mind. A developing understanding from quantum physics makes it clear that were all in fact interconnected!

In this session we stayed with the process of embryonic development and took it a little further beyond the first three or four days into life that we considered the last time. We pondered upon the complex origami-like folding process of development. Using a sheet of paper folded to create a tube…



**Elevation: The ‘Primitive streak”first fold of the spine**

**cross section: The tube of the spinal chord**

… You may look at this tube in elevation and see a folded line. However when you look at it in cross-section and you see the folding has created a tube. This fold is referred to as *the Primitive Streak*. Hold up the folded sheet of paper in cross-section and consider that this early fold created in the first week of life is on its way to become your spinal chord.

In an important way the brain grows from the bottom up. Again using one hand to illustrate the process: the wrist as it bulges into the palm is the equivalent of the brain stem. This forms the most primitive and deepest layer of the brain. It contains all the vital functions that regulate breath, heartbeat and balance. The fight flight or freeze response is also buried deep in this region of the brain stem. The next developmental sequence is illustrated by how the fingers grow out from the palm of the hand. Again they fold into a fist with the thumb folded deep into the palm of your hand. Now the fingers and fingernails folded into the palm represent the deep sub-cortical structures known as ***the Limbic System***. The limbic system first developed in the form that it has within our own human brain some 200 billion years ago when mammals first evolved. Each of the five fingers then represents five key functions of this vital deep area of the brain:

1. **Appraisal:**  this important primitive system assigns value and importance. This is a system that would wake you up at night instantly if there were unfamiliar footfall or a baby's cry. It never sleeps!!
2. **Motivation:** This system works in close corporation with the adrenaline-fuelled fight, freeze or flight response.
3. **Affect:**  this system contains all the primitive emotions like rage, anger and disgust.
4. **Memory:** the primitive form of memory contained in this system is referred to as ***implicit memory***. These are not like the explicit memories stored by the Remembering Self. They create an ambience and account for how you feel about yourself.
5. **Attachment:** This system creates the uniquely mammalian feature of attachment, bonding and caring for the young. Through the workings of this primitive system we become bonded together.

It is very important to know about these primitive functions. The function 4): the one that stores implicit memories is most rewarding to reflect upon. The sense of self or Ego, which becomes eventually the remembering self, is formed entirely of implicit memories that create a sense of what it feels like to be you! These feelings were fully created around the age of two years old-well before the stories of the Remembering Self had even begun to be woven wall!

**A 15-minute Mindfulness-in-Action procedure: “May I be safe and well. May others around me be also safe and well”**

To close this session in the room of Good Sense we dipped the hand of attention into the river of present moment sensations and we turned attention inwards to the current of the breath, which eventually touches every part of the inner landscape. We ”surf-ride” that current of breath in order to touch-in with the Brain’s Primitive Safety Security GCHQ network in the Limbic System as earlier described in the earlier sessions. The details of this particular meditation are outlined in the first session in the series.

We close this session with a deep sense of gratitude and appreciation for our human brain and in particular, how this millions of years old primitive system looks after us moment by moment.

From this deep place of attachments and connection we initiated a joint wish or intention that we be safe and well and that each individual present may continue to be safe and well.

**A 10-minute Mindfulness-in-Action procedure: A demonstration of the power of Non-doing to initiate change in the tissue and fabric of the body.**

This procedure begins with the establishment of a baseline. We use a right-hand index finger lifted and pointed at shoulder height. Then we twist around the central axis until we come to an elastic stop. After establishing this benchmark, there follows a series of five moves. These involve a mind-scrambling process of turning your eyes to the opposite direction that the fingertip moves as it turns around to the right. The effect of this, when we return to the benchmark, is to have created much more freedom in the twist around to the right.

We begin exactly the same on the other side and establish a benchmark for the left-hand index finger, as it turns round to the left. With this benchmark in mind we then repeat the same moves as for the right but without carrying out any of the actions. All of the same moves are mentally imagined and rehearsed. At the end of the imaginary movements there is pretty much the same extra freedom in the twist. This is a demonstration of the neuro- side of the neuro-muscular partnership and the power of thinking to create extraordinary changes in the tissue and fabric of the connective tissues of the body!

**A 30-minute Mindfulness-in-Action “Activity-in-Stillness” Procedure:**

Before we begin this procedure we review the two mindfulness-in action approaches: one that finds *stillness in activities*. This involves finding the minimum energy to create a move such as a simple forward step. Minimum energy here also means the maximum amount of released length in muscles. This released length is seen as the backdrop that forms the tissue life of stillness. Focused attention on release is an important part of the process. However in this session we delve into the *activity in the stillness* process itself. This invites your attention on a journey, an adventure into the inner wilderness as we defined it earlier in the day: the areas of inner landscape of which we have no dominion or control – far and away to bigger proportion of the Doing and Being Proportion Pie. In this session we attend to observe the activities that are spent, not in muscle energy but which are consumed in the form of finer neuro-energy.

We lay on the floor for this 30-minute procedure. We make every effort to bring the body into a still and restful lying down posture if the compassionate quality of attention we want to engage, could do its job completely and thoroughly, in this position we would change a state of complete stillness and *repose.* The reasons for neutralizing any demands on muscle action in terms of support, balance or movement have been considered in more detail in the notes for session 3.

We begin with the global sensations from the skin. The skin is an important inside and outside interface. The way that the brain buried deep in the skull keeps contact with the immediate world around it. We take in with our attention the immediate sensations of support from the cushions and from the floor. We invite release of tight areas in order to bring the body into a state of mechanical rest. We are on the way – not an easy journey, to a state of repose!

The global sense of the skin surface becomes more site-specific as we draw attention to the sensations around the lips and nostrils that form the point of entry of the breath as it enters the body. Once the breath is inside the body it becomes a living directed current. The breath is a medium that gently touches everywhere within the inner landscape. For this reason the breath can be likened to a GPS system that we can use to guide attention as it enters into the inner wilderness.

As we delve deeper into the present moment sensations from the inner wilderness, we are meanwhile, vigilant and watchful of the behaviour of the Remembering self, the storyteller: We aim simply to notice any interference that the Remembering Self initiates and the way that it will attempt to pull attention back into a more Doing sphere. When it does this it sometimes helps to say: “story”. We aim to maintain a return to the breath as an important anchor that will maintain attention in the sensations of the present moment and with the Experiencing Self.

As your conscious attention immerses is itself into the rich detail, we affirm and guide the Non-doing nature of our exploration. It is important that there is no sense of wanting to do anything, to correct or change to manipulate control anything. We are simply present In order to notice and observe. We need to guide and return attention repeatedly to the soft touch of the breath. The breath can be thought of as being like a mother's kind caress. The quality of attention is kind caring curious and compassionate! As we have repeatedly returned to: ***being kind to yourself truly is an extraordinarily difficult challenge!***

Over the period of the exercise you're asked to consider five specific areas of the inner landscape, that may, if you are sufficiently still and attentive, in some way call out to your caring attention. In fact these could well be areas that are tingling and drawing your attention because they are full of wholesome well-being. Often though, the areas that draw compassionate attention are in some way bound up, tight uncomfortable or in some way resistant and held. Your attention will cradle these areas in a gentle compassionate touch.

There is always an overwhelming richness of sensation from the inner landscape. At first you may not be aware of the many sensations that are there. You simply need to be patient willing and still. If you are sufficiently attuned these areas will reveal themselves to you. Often these are areas that are vivid or prominent because they are in some way in pain or distress. Sometimes they are simply the weaker links in the chain – areas of earlier trauma or distress. Because they are uncomfortable we tend to turn away from them. Here we want to do the complete opposite and turn our compassionate attention toward them.

The experiencing self is a state of wonder and questions. As part of this exploration and as you focus of the five areas there are certain questions to guide your curiosity and compassionate attention**:**

* **Is the sensation I am experiencing surface or deep?**
* **How big is it?**
* **What are the boundaries around the area? Are the boundaries fuzzy or clear and precise?**
* **What are the sensations, do they throb, pulse, ache, stab, and itch?**
* **Over the period of immersing your attention and touching these areas do the sensations stay the same or do they change?**

If and whenever the Remembering Self, the storyteller pulls you away from the area, use your breath to bring your caring attention back to a fascination with what you can discover. Touch each area from the inside with your own breath. Do not force the process. The more willing you become the greater are the gifts that you receive from life in the present moment.

The procedure finishes with a focused attention that stays with the intention to move, to rollover and to come up into standing. We finish in standing with a sense of appreciation for the compassionate attention that is being brought to the procedure.

We end the session by singing together a pygmy song from the Cameroonian rainforest.

**FIFTH SESSION: 5 May 2016**

**Summary**

**In the Room of Healthy Action**

**Arrivals 1) Rhythm, movement, voice and breath**

We move and interweave to arrive and to warm-up with:

* the throw catch game: “Jeek-ah-Lee-Lay”
* Zulu chant and movement: “Him-Nan-Dee-Lem-Belo” It means:

***“Yes – but life is great!”***

**Arrivals 2) The Game of Opposites**

Moving around the room and dodging each other, we then stop moving with the word **“Stop!”** and we continue to move around to the word “**Go!”** Then the meaning of these words gets swapped round. We also play the Opposite’s game with the words “**Walk!**” and **“Sing!”**

**Arrivals 3) Mindfulness- in-Action Body Awareness Procedure**

Using the Experiencing Self and attention in order to stand upright with presence. Building the toppling tower. Side to side weight transfer. Front to back sway. Using an awareness around the knee as *"the bubble - in - the spirit -level*” that indicates optimum alignment and ease in the upright posture has been achieved.

**A reflection on developmental embryology and natural dignity**

How ‘the first fold’ in early foetal development creates the spine and nervous system. That fold is still there buried deep in the central core of your spine. Your backbone forms the key rod or armature of the body’s support system. How awareness of the well-functioning of the spine involves a natural dignity in the backbone. This dignity of length forms a disciplined focus of attention to return to in the contemplative walk where we take one-step forward and one step back.

**In the Room of Good Sense**

**Reflections 1)**

Here we reviewed the discussion from the last session in which we used a hoop on the wall to represent the circle of the whole of oneself. We used this to question and to establish some sense of the proportion in our lives of ***Doing to Being.***

**Reflections 2)**

A review of the previous session on the origins of the skin, the nervous system and also: how the brain grows from the bottom-up and from the back to the front.

**A 20-minute Mindfulness-in-Action procedure**

We maintained a mindful attention to the length of the spine in this session. Instead of using the soft easy chairs in the Room of Good Sense for this meditation, we sat on hard chairs or stools to encourage the backbone to be self-supporting in this session.

In this procedure we anchor attention to the Experiencing Self, using the breath and sensations from the skin in a mindful awareness. This procedure is extended to also take in the ears and the process of mindfully “listening loudly” to the Lake of Surrounding Sound. This forms yet another important anchor to maintain attention to the Experiencing Self. In the meantime a vigilant watchfulness to the interferences from the Remembering Self is invoked!

**Questions**

On the nature and role of comfort and discomfort.

**Personal reflection**

An early ‘accidental’ encounter with the astounding healing power and potential within the Experiencing Self!

**In the Room of Healthy Action**

**Reflections**

On two possible ways into the inner landscape: ***finding the stillness in activity and finding the activity in stillness.*** Reviewing ***the tissue life of stillness*** and the process of release and letting go. The Remembering Self and how it creates limiting and restrictive tension patterns within the body. Perhaps it does this in reaction to how the Remembering Self thinks ***that life should be***? The Remembering self is highly judgmental and only knows ***stories about life and how it considers what life should be***. Only the Experiencing Self can deal with the reality of life in the present moment. Only from this place can we respond to life!

**A 30-minute Mindfulness-in-Action “Activity-in-Stillness” Procedure**

*Revealing five “animals” in the Inner Wilderness.*

This procedure follows on from last week's session. The session closes with the challenge of maintaining presence and attention to the dignity of length into spine as we go through the movements that bring us back into the upright position.

**Course Notes**

**Reviewing Mindfulness-in-Action Challenges**

Exploring Mindfulness-in-Action inevitably brings about different confrontations and challenges. As we approach the final session perhaps this is perhaps a good point to consider key Mindfulness-in-Action challenges.

**The Remembering self and the Experiencing Self as embodying two different kinds of human thought:**

In the series so far we have been explored a framework of ideas which suggests that we have **a Greater Self** and that we have **a Lesser Self.** The Lesser Self has been referred to in this framework as **the Remembering Self**. The Remembering Self embodies a form of human thought that is ***re-presentational***. This form of thought predominantly uses symbols and particularly language in order to create ways in which we are able to organize action by learning from the past and planning for the future. The form of thought associated with the Remembering Self is the one most familiar to us and the one to which we have been educated and conditioned. The Remembering Self also includes the Ego and is incessantly at work creating trajectories that either come from the past or that arc off into the future. Whether these trajectories arrive from the past or depart into the future, they inevitably are deposited NOW - in **the Present Moment**.

We have been exploring the possibility that the Present Moment embodies the Experiencing Self and that, ***when conscious attention merges with the Experiencing Self a new and quite different quality of human thought is revealed***. This is a qualitatively different form of human thought or cognition and it is ***not*** language-based and is ***not*** past or future orientated. This form of thought does not ***think about things***, as does the re-presentational form in the Remembering Self, instead ***it thinks into them.*** There is a special ethos about this quality of thinking: it is a ***natural expression of human curiosity, awe and wonder.*** This form of thought deals with what is Real and it also opens the possibility to respond to Life- that is the life that we have in the present moment – the only true possession that we have! This form of thought concerns direct ***felt experience***. It can be considered to embody a direct connection to the four key mindfulness “kuhs”:

* **kindness**
* **caring**
* **curiosity**
* **compassion**

These qualities are felt directly by the Experiencing Self because they are the essence of life itself. Right up to the moment of death life will continue moving in the direction of improved integrity and coherence. Life addresses ***what is-*** whatever the circumstances!

A special challenge that we face in Mindfulness-in-Action is ***the challenge of wresting attention away from the ego concerns of the Remembering Self, in order for attention to immerse itself in immediate experience.*** This immersion initiates a special alchemy out of which transformation and enlightenment may emerge. The “lead into gold “aspect of this alchemy reveals itself in the felt qualities of kindness, caring curiosity and compassion. These are felt as direct experience within the knowingness of the Experiencing Self. When we think ***about*** the golden four “kuhs” and when we put them into the words: ***Kindness, care, curiosity and compassion*,** while this might point toward the experience, ***the words themselves are not the felt experience.*** The extraordinary gift of the four “kuhs” forever remains buried directly beneath us as the hidden treasure of the present moment! The Remembering Self insists however, that we are chasing the treasure when in truth it could not be more accessible: it is buried directly beneath us- wherever we are!

It is possible that ***the four “kuhs***” that form an integral part of the felt experience of the Experiencing Self and the Present Moment, can become the basis for consciously following through from intention through to our action and conduct in the world. This form of thought-into-action clearly reveals that it is in fact the basis and foundation for the flourishing of language-based human thought. It reveals and connects us back to our origins!

There are inherent flaws in the Remembering Self and in representational thought. Some of the difficulties we face in Mindfulness-in-Action can perhaps be better understood if we go deeper into the way that this form of thought functions and originates:

***1) It proceeds by a process of detachment and abstraction from direct experience.*** Most of the rest of the animal kingdom is entirely trapped in reactivity to the direct experience in the present moment. What has become conscious in the human form of representational thought, has been achieved by a high level of selection and sampling of a tiny but significant proportion of the whole and that is: ***the end product or*** ***the end result.*** This may explain why the world that the Remembering Self creates is so perpetually ego-driven by the kind of end product thinking why it is that the Remembering Self is perpetually anxious about what life should be or should not be. A neurotic anxiety tends to underlie the stories that the Remembering Self weaves.

***2) The better and better the Representational Self becomes at creating maps, the more likely it is to confuse the map with the territory.***

In this way we may come to entirely lose out on life and the present moment!

3) The final flaw concerns how the Remembering Self eventually becomes so remarkably effective in manipulating and controlling stories about the past and future, that ***it comes to think that it is in total charge -and that it is in some way doing life*** – that it is making it all happen. The Remembering Self is not in charge of life. It is however, very much in charge of stories about life. In this way we continue to become so pulled out of the present moment that we cannot ***be*** anything any more!

We have considered that the moment of enlightenment might be likened to the two great horses that represent the two different human thought systems embodied in the Remembering Self and the Experiencing Self. As they come together and get to know and acknowledge each other, they pull for once, in the same direction. The Remembering Self then is able to free itself of the erroneous idea that it is its job ***to provide the energy to drive instead of just to steer*** the chariot. This error alone creates a huge chunk of human suffering and distress. In the transformative moment of enlightenment, when these two forms of thought move together, then the charioteer guides the chariot with the full awareness of the four “kuhs”: The enlightened Self begins to act in the world with kindness, caring, curiosity, and compassion.

**The Special Challenge of Comfort and Discomfort**

Mindfulness practice involves the special effort to anchor attention in the Experiencing Self and in the sensations of the Present Moment***. It can initiate a radical change in attitude to discomfort and comfort***. For the Remembering Self comfort (what we like) is to be sought and maintained and discomfort (what we do not like) is to be avoided and moved away from. The Remembering Self generates a complex series of often rapidly changing likes and dislikes and their associated feelings of comfort and discomfort. The Remembering Self is reactive in respect to comfort and discomfort. It “cattle prods” us into a reaction.

For the Experiencing Self, bodily states that are labeled by the Remembering Self as comfortable (LIKE) and uncomfortable (DISLIKE) ***draw an equal curiosity and wonder.*** The alchemy that brings conscious attention to the bodily sensations of comfort and discomfort these enable a different responsiveness to open up.  ***The Experiencing Self RESPONDS rather than REACTS to these states***. Reactively pulling away and retracting from discomfort changes to the opposite: the attention moves towards to soften and open rather than protectively pull away and to close down. Out of this responsiveness grows a complex sequence of choices that flow around difficulties and obstacles. This is in stark contrast to the Remembering Self, which generates tension and resistance when life does not turn out to be, as it SHOULD in terms of the life-scripts that the Remembering Self creates about life. That resistance has a definite tissue life that binds itself into the tissue and fabric of the body. The effect of this is to block the free circulatory flow of life-energy through the body. It creates patterns of deadness that restrict the free flow of life through the present moment. These patterns are “the animals in the wilderness” that we invite to reveal themselves in the activity-in-stillness procedure. The more we get to know them the more we can respond to them and change.

The Mindfulness-in-Action procedures may develop considerable resistance to letting go and release. It is rarely an easy process to deal with the reactivity of the Remembering Self! Often it does not like or particularly want the complex hotchpotch of likes and dislikes to be too closely scrutinized. It requires determination and dogged persistence. In the end this always pays great dividends because it is an expression of the 'kuhs': kindness, care, curiosity and compassion. Allowing these 'treasures' to willingly come into one's life is not easy but the effect is always liberating, easing and purifying. In fact those bound-up tension patterns that reveal themselves like wild creatures in the wilderness are nothing more than blocked energy waiting to be released and move through the present moment. When that energy is freed to flow it heals and strengthens. What flows out of the Experiencing Self and its kind and curious attention to discomfort, reveals the insightful origins of the word ***'comfort'.*** It means ***'com'*** 'with' and ***'fort':*** strength and fortitude. It is through a process of finding a way through these inner confrontations that we are able to experience comfort as process of being with strength. In this way we grow and develop strength of character.

When the Remembering Self restricts experience to the narrow confines of comfort and ‘like’ and discomfort "dislike", it is apt to reinforce weakness of character. We cannot come to full potential in that way. The sense of responding to discomfort in ways that develop strength, stature and moral backbone happen only when attention is allowed to wholly immerse itself in the sensations of the present moment and the thinking-in-action process of the Experiencing Self.

We live in a highly Ego-driven Comfort Culture that has now generated so many options to pamper and cater for the complex likes and dislikes of the Ego and the Remembering Self. Other older cultures and wisdom traditions reflect very different views of how we might transcend the Ego and develop radical ways to confront discomfort. The Elizabethan use of the word ***“comfort”*** as say for example, in the King James Bible admonition to: '***Comfort ye my people '***clearl***y*** did not invoke everyone to go out and buy easy chairs and soft mattresses that accommodate to a weakened body's patterns of tension and flaccidity! The original meaning invokes something close to what we have been describing in the process of the Experiencing Self in which we may grow through discomfort to strength and resilience.

In the great wisdom traditions there are vastly different cultural backdrops and so very different emphases. However about certain salient details they are all 'on the same page'. ***In order to still mind and body and find true comfort they insist on a self-supporting and upright backbone in order to mediate***. It is important at all times in mindfulness practice to maintain a questioning curiosity. In the last session we moved from soft easy chairs with backrests to sitting upright on firm chairs or stools. If after a while, the body becomes uncomfortable, it is important to radically witness and interrogate the reactivity of the Remembering Self. Keep asking questions: especially if there is a sense that "this is wrong", "I shouldn't have been put in this position, “the person leading the meditation has made a mistake this is becoming too difficult for me to concentrate".

Maintain the questioning state and remember: it is repeatedly mentioned that you have options: the choice to soften into and open into the tensions that manifest themselves as discomfort. Or you may choose to move and alter your position but please undertake this mindfully and not in a fidgety reactive way. Stay with the intention to move into a more comfortable position and how the action flows in making the adjustment.

Everything pivots on maintaining a connection to the questioning curiosity of the Experiencing Self. Maintain this curiosity especially when your Remembering Self generates a stream of judgmental “should” and should nots”. Being kind to yourself - responding rather than reacting is never easy. As we delve deeper into the process we may eventually come to a more compassionate understanding of the question that resounded in the first session of the current series:

***Why is it so difficult to be truly kind to oneself***?

Here is an ancient true tale of Enlightenment from an older Japanese culture, one very different form our own Comfort Culture. The Buddhist monk Kyogen became enlightened after thousands of hours of intense and searching meditative self-work. His enlightened presence drew people from all over Japan. They came to sit in his presence and to question him. One adept asked him directly what it felt like to be enlightened. His answer shocked the adepts***:***

***"As miserable as ever".***

Here is a truly enlightened answer. Kyogen is not in some free-floating detached blissful state. The discomforts of life are every bit present and as miserable as ever! The transformative change has come about because Kyogen now ***responds rather than reacts*** to the discomfort. A huge and significant human suffering ceases when Kyogen releases and let's go of the Remembering Self’s reactions. ***Pain and discomfort are turned into human suffering by the reaction***. When we let go in this way it is a true experience of kindness. It certainly rarely comes easy!

Mindfulness-in-Action invites you to awaken and to be equally curious and observant of likes and dislikes, of comfort and discomfort. Such awakening is a first thing priority which can be followed by a process of becoming worldly knowledgeable about mindfulness. It does not work the other way round!

**SIXTH SESSION: 12 May 2016**

**Summary**

**In the Room of Healthy Action**

**Arrivals 1) Rhythm, movement, voice and breath**

We move around. Sing a Rainforest Song from the Baka Pygmies of the:.

**Arrivals 2)** Weight transfer. Standing on one leg. Review of being kind to oneself.

**Arrivals 3)** A contemplative walk. The one step forward one back. Mindful attention to present moment sensations.

**Arrivals 4) REFLECTIONS:** Mindfulness and the power in the point-of-not-quite-yet.

**In the Room of Openness**

Sitting with presence and attention.

**REFLECTIONS:** The way that the brain grows in infancy from the bottom-up and from back to front. The higher level Pre-frontal brain functions that integrates and brings coherence in Mindfulness Meditation.

**In the Room of Good Sense**

For this 30 minute procedure we sat back to back. This is a great way to bring attention back to your own back and to bring your own back into a relationship with someone else's back. It also relieves some of the strain of sitting with a self-supporting backbone! This developed into a focused synchronized movement and breath routine over 81 breaths that were grouped into 9 rounds of 9.

We finished by rubbing each other's backs.

**Course Concluding Reflections: Where have we come from?/Where are we going to?/Where are we now?**

**PART 1: Where have we come from?**

**Self-transcendence and Self Knowledge**

For me, a great moment of insight on this series of Mindfulness-in-Action courses came in the form of a forbearance within me that develops out of a deep understanding that: ***it is simply in the nature of the human self for it to be selfish***! There is a seed, a possibility and a potential for the human self to transcend its own selfish nature. To transcend this inherent selfishness it ***first*** must come to ***know and then to accept its*** own nature. This is the essence of the ancient Delphic Oracle and the admonition to ***"Know Thy Self".***

There are currently such a plethora of psychological studies that show how little we really know ourselves: *that we are not as considerate as we think we are; that we are not as good as we think we are; that we are not as honest as we think we are; that we are not as truthful as we think we are* – and so on.

A key difficulty that we face here is that the human Self continually insists on taking more responsibility for itself than is ever its due! Things fall into place if this difficulty is considered as part of an understanding that it is the nature of the self to think ***that it is much more in the centre of things and much more in control of everything than it ever in fact is.***

**Journeys and mental time travel**

On the course we explored the question: **"*where have we come?"*** and we did so from many horizons -some big and some small. Occasionally we explored ***mental time travel*** in order to reflect on and remember the various journeys we made to arrive in Bashful Alley Centre for the sessions. These journeys have enormous Mindfulness-in-Action potential to become destinations in themselves. In modern life we a great deal of time in dashing from A to B. A greater mindfulness of the spaces-in-between such as a routine journey can be such a rich source of insight!

**"*Where have we come?" Third developmental embryology perspective:***

How human attention is able to achieve the mysteries of mental time travel is indeed a source of deepest curiosity. We pondered on **"where we have come from”** cast in terms of an understanding of early embryonic life. This is an even deeper mystery. The extraordinary explosion of unfolding matter, energy and information that happened to us all in early foetal growth can be wonderfully humbling when looked at from a certain perspective! You did not create your life, your mind, your body or your self. An understanding of this extraordinary process can be remarkably insightful. The early origins of the nervous system may help to penetrate through the overwhelming and extraordinary mysteries that overwhelm us when faced with the operation in the brain, of a system of hundreds of billions of neurons each with a capacity to link up with 10,000 other neurons. We distilled from this a simplicity revealed in the origin of every cell in the brain and nervous system. They come from a humble beginning: ***as an outer surface or layer that is dedicated to an interaction between the inside of the embryo and the outside in the womb.***

It is interesting to consider how this inside/outside dimension presents itself even in the most protoplasmic fleck of life: In a simple cell the equivalent of the "brain" of that cell is not in *the nucleus* that is inside the cell but in the cell membrane that modulates between the inside of the cell and the outside world. Its "brain" is on the outside layer. The nucleus of the cell is in fact its gonads. It is possible to remove the nucleus and the cell will have a normal life – it simply will not be able to reproduce. Here apparent in the smallest and simplest of lifeforms is once more, a process that interacts between the inside and the outside world. Vastly complex as our nervous systems may have become, they are still basically engaged in the same inside/outside interactive process. In its unique human form we create with our marvelous brains vastly complicated representations of the world and these enable us to learn from our past and prepare for our future actions in our uniquely effective human way. All of this is possible because we create an inside/outside that forms the basis of the human Self. The skin plays a key role!

**The skin as an inside/outside interface.** **The formation of Self:**

The skin is an organ of the brain and nervous system. From its early embryonic role it remains the surface structure that it revealed itself to be in those first few days of life after conception. The ectodermal layer forms on the outside of the growing 'glob' of cells. As cells differentiate and start to form laminates or plates they then rapidly begin to fold and pleat themselves. In this marvelous origami the outer layer of cells, that began on the outside invaginate and move-on into the inside to become eventually, the skull based brain and nervous system. The skin remains the outermost organ of the brain. The skin is the way in which the skull-encased brain finds out about the immediate world around. In Mindfulness-in-Action practices the skin is readily available as a source of sensation when conscious attention is lowered into the torrent of sensations that comes in from the skin surface every moment. We explored various procedures in which particular sensations from the skin form a readily accessible anchor for the discipline of maintaining attention to the Experiencing Self.

We discover the skin once again playing a vital role, this time much later on in the development of infant life. ***For the human sense of self to develop fully it is vitally necessary that there is the experience of the nurturance of loving touch.*** What develops out of this loving care and kindness enables the boundary that is the skin to play a key role in creating a world that is inside: ***Me***, and a world that is outside and that is***: Not me***. This boundary is vital to the process of a fully reflective sense of self. Despite the fact that it is a somewhat mysterious fiction, the Self remains vital to our humanness. The sense of self is like a shadow: ***it has no weight; furthermore it cannot be detected and it cannot be measured.*** Does this place an entity as vital to our humanity as the human sense of Self, outside the boundaries of material science? Certain immaterial things represent impenetrable mysteries and perhaps this may be the case with regard to the sense of self. In the formation of the sense of Self the similarly ***unmeasurable*** love and nurturance of human care and kindness play such a vital role.

**Looking after a dignity of length in the spine:**

We explored how the “first fold” of the nervous system and spine creates a tube. Although this first-fold tube was laid down in the first few days of life, it is still present right now as a tiny hole right down the middle of the spinal cord. On the course we chose to refer to this core of the spine in terms of ***a dignity of length.*** There is a certain poetry to this which does not quite match the exquisite poetry of DT Suzuki, who referred to it as ***“the axis of the coiled spring of the soul”.*** DT Suzuki was a Buddhist writer in the 1930s, one of the first to attempt to introduce Eastern ideas of the body to the West. We developed this idea of a dignity of length to help to anchor attention to the process of lifting the foot of the floor in a contemplative walk. If you revere and cherish this ancient connection- basically if you love it, then it becomes possible to take it along with you as you walk! This is a wonderful act of kindness!

**Two key Mindfulness aspects of a subcortical structure: the Limbic System**

**1) How implicit memories form the warp and weft of the sense of self.**

We also used our common embryonic origins to follow the development of the reptilian in brain: in the development of the subcortical structure of the Limbic System. We explored how five basic functions develop and still exist deep under the cortex. A key one of the five is the area that stores ***implicit memories***. These are crucial in the development of the uniquely human sense of Self. Implicit memories concern felt experience. These memories are laid down in the first two years of life long before we have yet developed a Remembering Self and ***the explicit memories*** that are stored in stories and language. It can be of great insight to know that the fabric and warp and weft of the sense of self is originally formed entirely of implicit memories. This is the deep area of the brain that contains the ineffable feeling-sense of how it uniquely feels to be you. ***As the sense of self-flourishes we identify with these feelings.*** In this way they become the central axis of our identity where they direct the life scripts and narrative stories that we tell and use to make sense of ourselves and the world.

Is it then possible to change such core feelings buried so deep and ingrained in subcortical structures? Such deep feelings can create a sense for example: of never being good enough no matter how hard we try. Mindfulness-in-action practice explores the possibility that we can break the identity problem, that we can stop identifying with these feelings, but only if there are examined from ***the bottom up and not from the storytelling Remembering Self that operates in a top-down way***. In terms of the Ancient Wisdom traditions this is referred to as ***self-transcendence and the way of self-knowledge.*** This process has many subtle levels but at any level they always involve the process of anchoring attention to the present moment sensations of the Experiencing Self. Great power and potential lies in the way that this creates an exit door from the self and a means of escape from that self-perpetuating and fundamental error that we are responsible for those feelings accrued way back in early infancy. The enlightening moment when this identity is broken and when the exit door opens is a moment of compassionate self acceptance and forgiveness. This is of course the act of kindness that is so fundamentally challenging and difficult to the Remembering Self. The identification with these feelings represents the limiting, clinging attachments pointed up by Buddhist psychology and their associated suffering.

**2) The Limbic System and safety and security**

Often on the Mindfulness-in-Action course we return the Omni-present nourishing touch of the breath on the inner landscape to discover, in the present moment, the workings of deep neurological structures like the Limbic System. This system also plays a key role in the brains safety and security GCHQ. This system continually filters mind-boggling masses of sensory information and assigns significance in terms of safety and security. Complex as the operation of the system is, it comes to a simple "Yea or Nay" conclusion in which the system opens up and the social engagement circuitry becomes engaged engaged: If "Yea" then we are open and ready to learn. Or it comes to the conclusion "Nay" that the situation is not safe and secure then we close down any interaction with those around us.

As with all Mindfulness in action processes the highest levels of the brain become engaged in order to be observant and oversee these more ancient systems. As with comfort and discomfort these higher-level watchful systems are benignly indifferent to the outcome and maintain a watchful curiosity. There is at the very highest level of our human functioning, a heartedness and courage to feel that sense of fear and hostility and instead of reacting to it we become able to respond. Whenever we achieve this we experience the exact same forbearance and forgiveness that breaks the hold of the identification of the Self with implicit memories.